Review of Cross-Jurisdictional and Promising Practices on Delivery of Adult Basic Education

FINAL REPORT

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Literacy and adult basic education (ABE) is a concern for both provincial/territorial and federal jurisdictions. Increasingly understood in terms of pluralities and social context, literacy is critical to individuals' ability to participate at work, at home and in the community. More broadly, there is demonstrable link between citizens' literacy levels and economic prosperity.

This literature review provides an inventory of ABE programs in provincial/territorial jurisdictions across Canada and summarizes reporting on outcomes and lessons learned from their experience. In addition, other research and policy analyses have been reviewed with the objective of identifying promising practices for delivery of ABE.

Saskatchewan is, in many ways, at the forefront of literacy training. For example, the province is developing a literacy strategy to guide its efforts, has developed literacy resources and a network to address the specific literacy needs of Aboriginal learners, has undertaken an ABE curriculum redesign and renewal phase, and is piloting interventions to integrate workplace and essential skills. In contrast to many provinces, full-time ABE learners in Saskatchewan are eligible for income support through the Provincial Training Allowance. While the province does some tracking of ABE participants and their outcomes, the results are not published. In addition, while there are some opportunities for online delivery of ABE (e.g., online Adult 12 through Parkland College), these appear to be somewhat limited in Saskatchewan compared to some other provinces that have invested more heavily in this area (e.g., BC, Ontario).

Promising practices that are identified in the paper include: raising awareness and outreach; assessment to predict needs and success; addressing barriers; flexible delivery; technology-enhanced learning; partnerships; ABE and workplace skills; targeted programs for underrepresented groups; and accountability.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND

a) Context

With the proclamation by the United Nations of the Literacy Decade (2003-2012) and its goal of increasing literacy levels by 50 per cent by the end of the decade, international attention and awareness of the scope and complexity of the issue of ABE, literacy and essential skills has increased tremendously, as have policy and program responses.

A key driver of the focus on basic skills and literacy is the increasing demand for a highly skilled workforce in a knowledge-based economy. Complex technology is a common feature in most sectors of the economy and many occupations place higher demands on individuals in terms of their basic skills (e.g., the ability to analyze information and understand abstract ideas). Some economic data show that raising literacy and numeracy skills for people at the bottom of the skills distribution is more important to economic growth than producing more highly skilled graduates. According to the CD Howe Institute (2005), "...a country's literacy skills rising by one percent ... is associated with an eventual 2.5 per cent rise in labour productivity and a 1.5 per cent rise in GDP per head. ... Moreover, the results indicate that raising literacy and numeracy for people at the bottom of the skills distribution is more important to economic growth than producing more highly skilled graduates". More recently, Murray et al (2008) estimate that raising literacy levels to the minimum international standard would yield a return on investment of 251 per cent (costs offset by increases in tax revenues and reductions in public income support).

The attention on basic skills and literacy has also fostered and been enhanced by a growth in available data. Whereas grade level completion was once used as a proxy measure for literacy, more sophisticated measures were introduced by the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS). This survey was conducted in 22 countries, including Canada, in 1994. The IALS was followed by the International Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey (IALSS) in 2003. Both surveys found that more than four in 10 Canadian adults aged 16 to 65 have literacy skills below the international standard considered necessary for an individual to function fully in today's world (higher if those over 65 are included in the calculation). Canada had a middling rating compared to 12 other developed nations in every assessment category. Notably, due to population growth, it is estimated that there are almost 1 million more people living in Canada today with low literacy skills than there were a decade ago (Advisory Committee on Literacy and Essential Skills, 2005). More disturbingly, the Canadian Council on Learning (2008) predicts that, owing to increased immigration and an aging population, by 2031, 47 per cent of adults aged 16 and over (representing over 15 million people) will have literacy skills below the internationally-accepted level to cope in a modern society.

The UN proclamation dovetailed with and, in some countries, initiated the development of comprehensive national literacy frameworks. While Canada does not have a national literacy strategy, the pan-Canadian *Literacy Action Plan* and the *Learn Canada 2020* initiative were developed by the Council of Ministers of Education Canada.[1] Work on adult basic skills and literacy has also proceeded on many other fronts. The Council of the Federation (COF), an organization established in December 2003 by the provincial premiers and government leaders of the territories, has identified literacy as one of its priority areas. Similarly, the Canadian Council on Learning (CCL) identified literacy as one of its five cross-cutting themes to guide the work of its Knowledge Centre. The Council of Ministers of Education Canada (CMEC) – composed of ministers responsible for education in all 13 provincial and territorial jurisdictions – has likewise declared literacy to be an area of focus, contributing to the knowledge base through research and international reporting initiatives.

Encouragingly, research has shown that adults can improve and maintain their basic or literacy skills through learning and practice, although, the converse is also true that literacy skills can erode if they're not used (CCL, 2007). The purpose of this assignment was to conduct a review of literature in the area of adult basic education (ABE) to derive promising/best practices for program design and delivery.

1.2   APPROACH

a)   Definition of Basic Skills/ Literacy/Essential Skills

The focus of this assignment was on ABE – a term that is not consistently used by jurisdictions, institutions or in the literature, and having significant overlap with literacy. Literacy is increasingly understood in terms of multiple literacies or pluralities, having many dimensions and rooted in social contexts. Definitions of literacy commonly refer to the reading, writing and numeracy skills used in everyday life or to those that allow one to function competently in society. For example, the OECD defines literacy as "using printed and written information to function in society, to achieve one's goals and to develop one's knowledge and potential"[2]. A definition that is the basis for many current provincial/territorial definitions of literacy is the UNESCO (2003) definition: "Literacy is the ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate and compute, using printed and written materials associated with varying contexts. Literacy involves a continuum of learning in enabling individuals to achieve their goals, to develop their knowledge and potential, and to participate fully in their community and wider society." Because the basic skills required to meet everyday life are ever-evolving and expanding, the definition of these skills is generally broadening to include more complex skills such as problem solving.

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[1] In 2008, the Saskatchewan Minister of Advanced Education, Employment and Immigration and the Minister of Education (as members of the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada) signed Learn Canada 2020. This document provides provincial and territorial Ministers of Education with the framework they agreed to use to enhance Canada's education systems, learning opportunities, and overall education outcomes.

[2] http://www.oecd.org/document/2/0,3343,en_2649_39263294_2670850_1_1_1_1,00.html

One way to understand basic skills or literacy is the *essential skills* recognized by Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (HRSDC).[3] These skills have been identified as those that people use to perform a wide range of everyday life and workplace tasks, and are foundational for learning other higher-order skills. They include: reading text; use of documents; writing; numeracy; oral communication; thinking skills (problem solving, decision making, job task planning and organizing, finding information); working with others; computer use; and continuous learning.

The Conference Board of Canada's Employability Skills 2000+ is another widely used model in Canada. Within this model, employability skills refer to "the skills you need to enter, stay in and progress in the world of work – whether you work on your own or as part of a team" and are applicable to all workers. Employability skills include "communication, problem solving, positive attitudes and behaviours, adaptability, working with others, and science, technology and mathematics skills."[4]

ABE is one of many interventions designed to address gaps in literacy and essential skills. However, there is little in the literature that distinguishes ABE from other adult literacy interventions. According to one definition, "ABE applies to programs designed to raise educational levels to high-school equivalency for retraining, employment, or personal satisfaction… (and is)...used interchangeably with literacy projects to identify programs offering similar services" (Literacy Coalition of New Brunswick 2003). The Association of Canadian Community Colleges (ACCC) (2008) defines literacy programs as those for learners requiring upgrading from a Grade 9 level and below, while programs for grades 10 to 12 are referred to as Adult Upgrading Programs. In Saskatchewan, ABE is an umbrella term that refers to a wide range of services, credit and non-credit programs designed to help adult learners achieve their goals. For the purposes of this assignment, however, we have used a broader definition, with the assumption that promising and best practices in delivering ABE are likely to be similar to those for adult literacy programs. Thus, within the report, terms such as ABE, adult upgrading and adult literacy programs are used interchangeably.

b)   Scope of the Review

The scope of the literature review included the following five aspects:

> *Review of provincial/territorial government websites.* Websites in all 13 provinces and territories were investigated to summarize the types of ABE and literacy programs available to adult residents of the province/territory.[5] The focus was on provincial/territorial programs whose objectives refer to basic education, literacy or essential skills. These offerings were subsequently inventoried into a reporting template, capturing information such as program name, target group/eligibility criteria, delivery method, and partners.

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[3]   http://www.rhdcc-hrsdc.gc.ca/eng/workplaceskills/essential_skills/general/home.shtml

[4]   http://www.conferenceboard.ca/topics/education/learning-tools/employability-skills.aspx

[5]   The inventory, thus excludes interventions pertaining to ESL/FSL training, family literacy or skills training.

> ❯ *Search for evaluation or other evidence-based research conducted by the provinces/territories on program effectiveness or promising practices.* This search yielded some references and summaries of research on outcomes for ABE and literacy learners.

> ❯ *Review of Canadian literature (research studies, evaluations, consultations, policy and synthesis papers) on approaches to ABE.* Internet search terms included: 'practices/lessons/effective' and 'ABE', 'literacy', 'essential skills'. In addition, a manual/systematic search was conducted of key Canadian public policy/research websites such as the Canadian Council on Learning, the Council of Ministers of Education of Canada, and the Canadian Policy Research Networks. Literature on promising practices on basic skills interventions for specific target groups (e.g., Aboriginal learners) was also examined. A sample of some best practice lists or criteria found in these documents is included in Appendix B.

> ❯ *Review of evaluations of Saskatchewan ABE or other programs.* This review included reports provided by the Ministry of Advanced Education, Employment and Immigration (AEEI) and those posted publicly.

> ❯ *Review of international literature on approaches to ABE.* Using Internet search terms similar to those mentioned above, a search was conducted of international literature including Australia, New Zealand, the United States and the European Union.

The result of the review is an inventory of provincial/territorial and federal programming with respect to ABE (included in Appendix C, under separate cover) and a narrative synthesis of generally accepted and promising practices with respect to policy and program design and delivery of ABE and adult literacy programs.

2. ADULT BASIC EDUCATION LANDSCAPE IN CANADA

2.1 OVERVIEW

ABE needs are addressed in Canada through various provincial, territorial and federal efforts, in collaboration with the nongovernmental sector. While the engagement of the various sectors in addressing the issue of adult literacy and essential skills is considered to be healthy in terms of the reach and diversity of programming, Canada's ABE and adult literacy programs are often described as being a 'patchwork' (Anglin, 2008), and fragmented and incomplete (Myers and deBroucker, 2006).

a)   Provincial/Territorial

ABE programs are designed to address knowledge and essential skills gaps and are offered in all of the provinces and territories.   Funding of the delivery of ABE is largely a provincial/territorial responsibility. Program funding is typically provided through the respective ministries of education and/or labour market/ human resources development programming, and is generally allocated either through core funding to education institutions or on a project basis for community-based nongovernmental organizations (CBOs). In Saskatchewan, responsibility for ABE and literacy is shared between the Ministry of Education (Literacy Office) (early literacy, family literacy, and work-based literacy) and the Ministry of Advanced Education, Employment and Immigration (ABE and adult literacy).

b)   Federal

While in Canada the responsibility for adult education lies with the respective provinces/ territories, the federal government also has an interest in ABE, literacy and essential skills policy and programming. A key priority for Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (HRSDC) is to "encourage skills development and training in Canadian workplaces and to invest in the development of tools and other support mechanisms to raise literacy and essential skills of Canadians" (HRSDC, 2008-09). The program instrument to meet these objectives is the federal Adult Learning, Literacy and Essential Skills Program (ALLESP) delivered by HRSDC.[6]

"As of April 1, 2007, the Office of Literacy and Essential Skills (OLES) under the Skills and Employment Branch is responsible for the implementation of ALLESP … As part of its goal to become a centre of expertise in matters related to literacy and essential skills, OLES uses the ALLESP terms and conditions through a grants and contributions model that funds projects intended to build knowledge and

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[6]   The ALLESP is an amalgamation of three programs – National Literacy Program, Office of Learning Technologies (OLT) and the Learning Initiatives Program.

expertise; develop, adapt and disseminate tools, supports and best practices; and, sustain partnerships with literacy and essential skills (LES) stakeholders (e.g. provinces and territories, employers, unions and literacy organizations) … The present terms and conditions for ALLESP will expire in March 2011. (HRSDC, October 2010)

The ALLESP, along with other federal literacy and essential skills resources have been directed towards areas of national interest and core federal responsibility. The key objectives of the ALLESP initiative are:

> To promote lifelong learning by reducing non-financial barriers to adult learning; and

> To facilitate the creation of opportunities for Canadians to acquire the learning, literacy and essential skills they need to participate in a knowledge-based economy and society.

ALLESP plays an indirect supporting/coordinating role rather than a direct delivery role in this area. Notably, through the development of partnerships with other federal departments/agencies, provinces/territories, business associations, labour associations and other stakeholders. Since 2007, ALLESP has provided core funding to 22 provincial and territorial literacy coalitions. Provincial/territorial coalitions are members of the national Movement for Canadian Literacy. ALLESP also provides project-based funding through a call for proposals process to address identified gaps in ABE and essential skills programming.

As part of the re-targeting, the program moved to the new Office of Literacy and Essential Skills (OLES) under the newly-created Skills and Employment Branch (SEB) in April 2007. This branch has an explicit labour market mandate, contributing to:

> Enhancing competitiveness of Canadian workplaces and increasing labour force participation;

> Reducing barriers for those seeking to enter or re-enter the labour market; creating opportunities for Canadians through training and mobility; and

> Investing in, recognizing and using skills in and for the workplace.

Additional federal involvement in ABE includes: direct literacy training for those incarcerated in federal correctional institutions (Correctional Service Canada); quantitative survey development and analysis (Statistics Canada); language training for new immigrants (Citizenship and Immigration Canada), and literacy support for people with disabilities (HRSDC). There are additional federal programs offered by HRSDC that target Aboriginal people such as Aboriginal Human Resource Development Agreements, the Aboriginal Skills and Employment Training Strategy (ASETS) and the Aboriginal Skills and Training Strategic Investment Fund. These funds, however, are focused on skills training linked to jobs/economic opportunities.

2.2   ADULT BASIC EDUCATION PROGRAMMING IN CANADA

An inventory of ABE programs available in each provincial/territorial jurisdiction is included in Appendix B (under separate cover). As indicated in section 1.2.b, above, the cross-jurisdictional inventory has been derived solely from government sources. Some observations and patterns that emerge from the inventory are summarized below.

a)   Definition and Scope of ABE

Provincial/territorial jurisdictions in Canada employ a variety of definitions or descriptors of their ABE programming, making reference to 'adult literacy', as well as 'essential skills' (the latter particularly in workplace-based programs). All jurisdictions position ABE as a foundation to enable participants to pursue further education or job-related training, or otherwise improve their employment situation. In addition, several jurisdictions such as Manitoba and the Yukon use the UNESCO definition, referring to broader goals of ABE such as enhancing literacy for participation in daily activities at work, home and in the community.

At the level of delivery, provincial/territorial jurisdictions include a variety of programming under ABE, typically:

> Basic literacy/numeracy skills (some jurisdictions define this to be grades 1-8 (Quebec) or use a level system, for example, Levels I (grades 1-6), II (grades 7-9) and III (grades 10-12) in Newfoundland);

> Academic upgrading or development/GED preparation;

> Life skills;

> Career or employment preparation/readiness; and

> Skills development (e.g., computer or technological skills training) (e.g., in Ontario).

In Saskatchewan, an Adult Basic Education Redesign Task Team was created in March 2001, to oversee the implementation of the recommendations. Their work was organized in four phases:

Phase 1: Planning and Foundations

> the vision, scope, guiding principles, goals and objectives for Adult Basic Education;

> a framework for credit programs;

> a curriculum development philosophy; and,

> recommendations for the remaining phases.

Phase 2: Curriculum Development

> ❯ process for developing benchmarks for Levels 1 and 2 (literacy); and,

> ❯ a process for developing and piloting curriculum guides for Adult 10, Level 3 credit courses (Communications, Social Sciences, Life/Work Studies, Science, and Mathematics).

Phase 3: Implementation

> ❯ a process for provincial implementation of new curricula including professional development activities and development of a Best Practices document.

Phase 4: Sustainability

> ❯ processes to ensure ongoing curriculum renewal, to support delivery of programs and to evaluate the effectiveness of programs and services.

During Phase 1, the team conducted research to discover trends and issues in adult education, both nationally and internationally. Consultations were also held with provincial stakeholders. The results of these activities informed the work of the Task Team and guided the development and content of Level 3 curricula.

In Saskatchewan, the Adult Basic Education Redesign Task Team *Phase 1 Report* (2002) defined ABE (again, in alignment with the UNESCO definition) as the knowledge, skills, abilities, and attitudes which allow adults to function at home, in the community, at work, or in further training. The goals of ABE programming may include:

> ❯ increasing education and/or and certification levels;

> ❯ gaining prerequisites for further training or employment;

> ❯ enhancing life skills, independence and self-sufficiency; or

> ❯ learning skills in specific areas (such as technological literacy, communication skills, or portfolio development).

The Task Team's consultations recommended that four levels of ABE be provided by post-secondary institutions in Saskatchewan:

> ❯ *Levels One and Two:* non-credit courses including basic literacy, employability and life skills, English-as-a-Second Language, and work-based skills; The Circle of Learning (Literacy Benchmarks for Levels One and Two) is the foundational document for Level One and Two literacy programs in post-secondary institutions and community-based organizations;

> *Level Three:* Adult 10 academic credit; and

> *Level Four:* Secondary Level Completion (Adult 12 and GED).

In Saskatchewan, critical to the planning and delivery of the ABE Level 3 curricula is the understanding and implementation of adult education principles. Six adult education principles (Imel, 1998) that demonstrate the treatment of learners as adults include:

> *Involving learners in planning and implementing learning activities.* Adults' past experiences, their current learning goals and their sense of self will influence what they want to learn and how they learn it. Instructors must actively engage adult participants in the learning process. They must also serve as facilitators; guiding learners to their own knowledge and helping them expand it rather than supplying them with facts to memorize.

> *Drawing upon learners' experiences as a resource.* Instruction that is personally and culturally relevant is vital for adult learners who bring with them a wealth of life experience and knowledge. By focusing on the strengths learners bring to the classroom, rather than their gaps in knowledge, learners are able to connect new learning with prior knowledge.

> *Cultivating self-direction in learners.* In a supportive, caring, and safe learning environment, instructors become mentors to adult learners. They help learners to develop skills that lead to self-direction, independent learning, and empowerment (rather than assuming that all learners are self-directed when they enter programs). Empowered adults are those who see themselves as decision-making citizens, as proactive community members who are responsible and accountable to themselves, their families, employers, and society.

> *Creating a climate that encourages and supports learning.* An atmosphere where learners can safely admit confusion, mistakes, ignorance, fears, biases, and different opinions is one that enhances learner self-esteem and reduces fear. Instruction must demonstrate respect and promote acceptance for diverse cultures, beliefs, values, religions, and lifestyles.

> *Fostering a spirit of collaboration in the learning setting.* Collaborative learning stresses the interdependence of each member. Learners collaborate with instructors and with each other. Collaboration is founded on the notion that the roles of instructor and learner can be interchangeable.

> *Using small groups.* This can help "achieve a learning environment that is more learner-centred and collaborative than either large group or one-on-one, individualized approaches to instruction" (Imel, 1998). Learning from peers and being accountable to a team also helps to develop social responsibility.

Adult education principles also have implications for the instructor/learner relationship.

b)   Eligibility

Eligibility criteria for provincially-funded ABE programs vary across jurisdictions, but typically rely on some combination of criteria related to:

› Age (17 to 19 years of age and, often, out of school for one year); and

› Need (as demonstrated by literacy gap or lack of high school diploma).

In New Brunswick, employability and participation in case management are also mentioned in the eligibility requirements.

c)   Targeting

Across Canada, many jurisdictions have identified target groups for literacy/ABE programming in their province:

› BC – remote learners, Aboriginal, low income, new Canadians;

› Manitoba – Aboriginal, Francophone;

› Ontario – Anglophone/Francophone, Deaf, Aboriginal, remote learners (through Independent Learning Centres);

› Quebec – learners with disabilities, immigrants, Aboriginal, under 30 years of age/over 45 years of age;

› NS – Aboriginal, African; and

› PEI – Aboriginal, women.

Targeting of programming may occur through delivery of customized training programs or use of delivery agents with expertise in delivering interventions to the identified target group. In Manitoba, an Aboriginal Focus is one of five components of the Manitoba Adult Literacy Strategy.

In Saskatchewan in 2000, a two year project was undertaken to increase awareness of Aboriginal literacy needs, issues and program initiatives in the province. The objectives of the Provincial Aboriginal Literacy Steering Committee overseeing the project were:

› To identify and share information about current Aboriginal literacy programs and initiatives within Saskatchewan through the development of a directory or catalogue of programs.

› To develop a mechanism for providing assistance to Aboriginal programs and ensuring a means for ongoing support to Aboriginal programs and initiatives.

> To develop a public awareness strategy that will engage all levels of government to recognize, support and sustain this Aboriginal literacy initiative.

> To establish effective connections and inputs with Aboriginal literacy programs, the Saskatchewan Literacy Steering Committee and projects at the national level to ensure a continual and circular flow of information.

> Following the Aboriginal gathering, the project will have identified strengths of current approaches, gaps in programming and curriculum, and areas requiring further improvement.

The Saskatchewan Aboriginal Literacy Network Steering Committee led to the development and incorporation of the Saskatchewan Aboriginal Literacy Network.

d) Partnering

A common theme across provinces and territories is the idea of partnering with resources that already exist to avoid "reinventing the wheel". In the majority of cases, partnerships are formed with public postsecondary institutions or CBOs. However, some of the provincial and territorial governments have worked successfully with public school boards, employers, the media, and Aboriginal organizations.

e) Funding

The cross-jurisdictional review of ABE programs in Canada revealed that all provincial/ territorial ABE programs are offered tuition-free to participants. Only a handful of provinces – Saskatchewan, Alberta and New Brunswick – offer income support to ABE students who are enrolled in full-time, approved ABE programs. Interestingly, two provinces – BC and Ontario – have recently increased funding to ABE to offset costs such as transportation, day care and books for eligible ABE students. Other examples of funding supports include free access to tutoring (Nova Scotia) and support for internet connection/long distance for e-learning (Newfoundland e-learning pilot project).

In Saskatchewan, publicly-funded post-secondary organizations receive funding to deliver ABE programs at no cost to the learner. Funded institutions include SIAST (Woodland, Kelsey, Wascana, and Palliser Campuses), Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies (SIIT), Dumont Technical Institute (DTI) and eight regional colleges. The Provincial Training Allowance (PTA) provides income support to low-income learners enrolled full-time in approved, publically-funded basic education programs. Approximately two-thirds of all learners who attend ABE programs receive the PTA.

Community-based organizations throughout the province receive funding to provide non-credit ABE programming but generally do not receive program or Provincial Training Allowance (PTA) support from the province. Provincial funding for ABE increased 17 per cent in 2010-11 over the last year thanks to one-time federal stimulus grant funding

ABE funding for Aboriginal learners falls under federal jurisdiction, with some program funding provided through ALLESP, as well as other labour market programs. First Nation learners who participate in programs held on-reserve receive federal social assistance.[7] In Saskatchewan, beginning in 2007-2008, funding was provided to educational institutions for the delivery of ABE programs on-reserve (serving 290 learners 2007-08 and 540 learners in 2009-2010).

f)   Outcomes

The cross-jurisdictional review revealed several examples of provincial/territorial practices with respect to tracking outcomes for ABE. One of the most comprehensive was a survey in BC in 2005 – an *Adult Basic Education Outcomes Survey*. The survey examined participants' employment outcomes following participation (including hours of work, earnings), as well as qualitative feedback and attribution of employment to their ABE course. Other provinces such as Alberta, Ontario, PEI and Manitoba publish annual reports based on administrative information (e.g., number of learners) and participant feedback. Outcome indicators variously include: participation levels (number of participants, socio-demographic profile); completion/discontinuation rates; satisfaction; extent to which course met learning/employment goals; certification (e.g., GED); post-program outcomes – typically participation in further training and/or employment. Saskatchewan tracks, though does not publish, these types of indicators.

There are few examples in the jurisdictional review of results-based funding of literacy work. One exception is the Northwest Territories which provides funding for literacy programs through the Community Literacy Development Fund. The program *Handbook* notes that:

> All applicants must provide evaluation data relevant to the literacy project they are administering in accordance with the NWT Literacy Strategy Results-based Management and Accountability Framework (RMAF). Examples of relevant data include number of participants completing program, number of supports utilized, number and type of resources developed and distributed, and percentage of participants who advance their literacy levels. Assistance will be provided in determining acceptable data criteria per project. Applicants who are reapplying for funds must provide an evaluation of the previous year's activities to demonstrate the program's success.

According to *Ontario Learns: Strengthening our Adult Education System*, a performance management system is being implemented for the Literacy and Basic Skills Program. Core measures will include efficiency, effectiveness and learner satisfaction, with activity and learner information uploaded by delivery agencies on a monthly basis. Plans are reportedly underway to link funding to performance.

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[7] INAC policy changes in 2009 allowing social assistance recipients to continue receiving SAP while enrolled in adult education programs.

g) Literacy Strategies

Many provinces and territories have literacy strategies or frameworks in place. Alberta's *Living Literacy: A Literacy Framework for Alberta's Next Generation Economy* lays out goals and coordinated efforts to achieve improvements in literacy from early childhood to adult education. In British Columbia, *ReadNowBC* is the province's Literacy Action Plan and Literacy Outreach Coordinators facilitate the development of District Literacy Plans that include goals and implementation plans for each region of the province (though funding for these positions has recently been cut). Manitoba has embedded its literacy efforts in legislation – the new *Adult Literacy Act* (2007). The Council of Atlantic Ministers of Education and Training released *Literacy: Key to Learning and Path to Prosperity – An Action Plan for Atlantic Canada 2009-2014* which outlines goals and initiatives to improve literacy within Atlantic Canada. Several provinces have established a dedicated office or secretariat to coordinate literacy policy and activities in their jurisdiction (e.g., PEI – Literacy Initiatives Secretariat and Saskatchewan – Ministry of Education, Literacy Office).

Other activities include:

› Manitoba has consulted with committees on outcomes measurement and will be reporting on performance in the near future;

› Quebec has developed a Policy Action Plan that outlines requirements for reception, referral, counselling and support services for adult learners and has conducted research into priority adult learning needs. In order to help adults determine the level of basic education they have attained, a record of learning in basic general education is established for all adults who undertake to continue or complete their basic education;

› Nova Scotia has identified strategic priorities for adult learning;

› Newfoundland and Prince Edward Island have both outlined best practices for the delivery of adult learning;

› Alberta has developed a framework and action plan to strengthen community adult learning councils and community learning programs; and

› Saskatchewan Ministries of Education and Advanced Education, Employment and Immigration are in the process of developing a provincial literacy strategy.

3. PROMISING PRACTICES

This chapter presents information on promising practices drawn from the literature that was reviewed.

3.1 RAISING AWARENESS AND OUTREACH

As noted earlier, the IALS and IALLS data indicate that over four in ten Canadians do not have the literacy skills considered adequate to meet the demands of everyday life and work in a knowledge-based society. The number of Canadians who seek out and take part in ABE or literacy programs represent a small fraction of this segment of the population. According to ABC Canada (2002), only five to ten per cent of eligible adults have ever enrolled in a literacy or essential skills upgrading program. Research reported by the Canadian Council on Learning (CCL) (2008) and the Canadian Policy Research Networks (CPRN) (2006) indicates that individuals with lower literacy levels are less likely to have participated in continuing education and training opportunities in the previous 12 months of any kind.[8] Barton & Hamilton (2000) conclude that within their work and social context, many people have the literacy or decoding skills that meet their needs, whether or not they meet the minimum level set by statisticians (cited by Veeman, 2002). Also, the benefits of improving and upgrading basic skills may be less persuasive in the face of other barriers (e.g., difficulties experienced during initial schooling, social stigma).

An overarching premise in adult education is that ABE learners need to be *encouraged*. Thus, much energy has been expended on creating public awareness about the importance of literacy – including recognizing literacy challenges, promoting the employment benefits of improving essential skills and increasing social and community participation in addressing adult literacy and numeracy.

A panel of experts convened by the CCL (2008) recommended a multi-channel marketing campaign to raise awareness and enhance outreach to targeted individuals including the dissemination of print and on-line materials that focus on community organizations and agencies that serve as information distributors. Recommendations for distribution sources for promotional materials include: employment resource centres; employment-related service providers and government bodies; libraries; local coffee shops; food banks; children's schools; parenting groups; health-care providers; and frontline service providers such as hospital workers, social workers and religious leaders.

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[8] This is consistent with the adult education literature in general: less-educated adults are five times less likely to participate in structured learning than those with a university degree.

Other recommendations that were put forward for ABE and literacy program outreach and recruitment include:

› placing a limited number of newspaper advertisements in various local newspapers, running the ads during "peak times" when people generally seek training or assistance with job searches;

› liaising with employment resource centres that facilitate literacy and essential skills information-sharing sessions in person, through their web-site or by e-mail;

› offering program information sessions to health-care providers, government service providers and community-based organizations that offer employment assistance; and

› promoting ABE programs through displays and presentations at career fairs, job fairs and similar events related to employment assistance.

The literature also notes the potential benefit of formal referral protocols to increase awareness and outreach. An example of this (cited in CPRN (2007)) is the Nova Scotia School of Adult Learning, which introduced a formal referral protocol for all service providers. The purpose is to ensure that learners, at any entry point, receive information and advice to help them decide what program option would work best for them. Alternatively, in Quebec, the Literacy Foundation (Fondation pour l'alphabétisation) uses a 1-800 number for referral purposes and a toll free Employment Ontario hotline provides a similar service in that province. In BC and New Brunswick, regional Literacy Coordinators help to foster public awareness of literacy and program offerings and also coordinate regional delivery of publicly-funded programs.

Another approach to outreach for literacy and essential skills programming is workplace-based upgrading. Workplace-based initiatives have the added advantage of marrying essential skills training (e.g., communications, teamwork) with technical skills training. This blended approach builds on employees basic skills while reducing the barriers (e.g., stigma, time, costs) and enhancing the perceived personal benefits/utility that are often associated with ABE programs (Conference Board of Canada, 2006) (see Section 3.7 for more on workplace literacy). In Saskatchewan, the Workplace Essential Skills program supports business and industry to prepare low-skilled job seekers and low-skilled employees in the workplace to gain the workplace essential skills needed for sustainable long-term employment or advancement.

Finally, in the cross-jurisdictional review of ABE programming, there were several examples of provinces that have created resource or learning centres for 'single-window' access to adult learning resources and programs. The CPRN (2007) identified the Manitoba Adult Learning Centres (ALCs) as a promising practice to enhance access and provide programming through partnered delivery with either a high school or post-secondary institute. Similarly, in Ontario a review of adult education in the province recommended that Essential Skills Resource Centres be established across the province based on the model developed at Fanshawe College ((*Innovative Approaches and Promising Directions.* Ontario College Sector Committee for Adult Upgrading, 2006). New Brunswick and Quebec also have Adult Learning Centres and Adult Education Centres (respectively).

3.2 ASSESSMENT TO PREDICT NEEDS AND SUCCESS

Entrance into an ABE or literacy program is generally preceded by an assessment of the learner's skills, abilities and prior learning (both formal and informal). Examples of tools for assessing participants' current literacy and basic skills levels include: the Educational Testing Service (ETS) Prose, Document and Qualitative (PDQ) assessment; the Test of Workplace Essential Skills (TOWES); Canadian Adult Achievement Test (CAAT); as well as other informal assessment methods. The literature also points to the value of undertaking a more comprehensive assessment of individual factors that may impact on program effectiveness or learner success. CCL (2008) experts identified the following variables as important when assessing the needs of adult learners:

> *educational attainment* – the level of education attained affects the level of effort required to raise literacy levels;

> *age group* – average age will influence recruitment and retention costs and the return on investment because the older the participant, the shorter the period over which the costs can be amortized;

> *the presence of children in the home* – this may impede participation in programs, but could also open up the possibility of applying cost-effective family literacy approaches;

> *information on income and employment status* – these are potential indicators of who could fund the cost of literacy upgrading (e.g., individuals and/or employers);

> *firm size* – employed adults may be able to access training at their worksite, especially if they are working for a larger firm (over 100 employees) with the infrastructure and resources to finance programs;

> *attitudes toward information and communication technologies* – to gauge the degree to which upgrading might rely on computer-aided instruction (for those unfamiliar with or fearful of technology, technology would have to be introduced very carefully, and with a good deal of support for program participants);

> *self-perception of adequacy of skill levels* – self-perception can negatively impact recruitment and retention efforts if adults feel their current skill levels are adequate; and

> *oral language proficiency* – weak oral language skills will reduce the efficiency and effectiveness of literacy instruction.

The Saskatchewan Intake and Assessment Framework for Basic Education and Related Programs for Adults (2003) is an example of a comprehensive model. Based on best practices for intake and assessment processes, the document assists service providers and organizations within

Saskatchewan's basic education and career and employment services delivery system to develop complementary and effective referral and placement services for individuals who are interested in pursuing further education, training, or employment. Standardized testing is used, as well as interviews and other knowledge, skills, and attitudes inventories

Ontario and New Brunswick use the Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR) model which identifies, assesses and recognizes the skills and knowledge adults have acquired through both formal and informal learning. The process is seen as a pathway into a training program, academic credit or occupational certification. Nunavut Arctic College is currently piloting a three-year research project to create a portfolio development course within their Adult Basic Education program that would enable adult learners to identify, value, and document the full breadth of their life learning. An interim evaluation of the pilot was very positive about the model, which received approval from the perspective of both adult educators and learners (Proactive Information Services, 2008).

Recognition of prior learning is found by an OECD report (2003) to aid in learner motivation. Assessing and giving credit for knowledge and skills acquired in work, home or community settings can ensure that learners do not have to repeat material from prior learning. According to the European Association for the Education of Adults (2006), 'recognition of non-formal and informal learning' is a complex area for potential learners. They are not always aware of the opportunities for recognition that exist and the concept can be totally foreign to them. Portugal's national system for the recognition, validation and certification of school attainment and personal experience is noted as a promising practice in this respect.

For Comings (2007), a first step in the recruitment and assessment phase would be to help students express clear goals that represent their motivation for participation. The second step would be to develop a learning plan that includes both instruction and the support services a student needs to persist in learning to reach those goals.

3.3   ADDRESSING BARRIERS

There is a good deal of literature that examines the barriers to participation and persistence in ABE and literacy programs. This research has been motivated by the relatively low participation rate and an historically high discontinuation rate in ABE and literacy programs. Although reported results vary among programs, discontinuation rates in ABE programs can be as high as 33 per cent (ABC Canada, 2001). In Saskatchewan, discontinuation rates in ABE programs in the last four years have ranged between 37 and 44 per cent. Completion rates tend to be highest for students enrolled in GED preparation programs and lowest for those in Level 3 ABE. Moreover, persistence matters – studies point to 100 hours of instruction as the point at which a majority of adult education students are likely to show measurable progress and, therefore, it serves as a benchmark for effective programs (Comings, 2007).

Researchers such as Myers and deBrouker (2006) and ABC Canada (2002) have identified a number of barriers to participation and persistence. They note that while lack of interest is often cited as a key reason for low participation rates in ABE programs, this finding stands in contrast to survey data that indicate there is a considerable unmet demand for programming among the least educated – roughly double the current rates of participation (confirmed by waiting lists for programs). For example, in Saskatchewan over the last four years, the wait list for provincially-funded ABE programs has numbered between 1,361 (2006/2007) and 2,137 (2008/2009) individuals – typically between one-quarter and one-third of enrollment in the year.[9] However, returning to ABE often requires a long-term commitment from individuals and according to Myers and deBrouker, "a great sacrifice and a profound leap of faith".

With respect to barriers to participation, the ABC Canada study identifies two key types of barriers: structural barriers and cognitive-emotive barriers. Structural barriers refer to the barriers in the broader institutional or individual environment. Cost and lack of time are the most frequent self-reported barriers to participation in ABE. Other structural barriers include: lack of awareness; unresponsive learning environment; job-related conflicts and family responsibilities; need for childcare and transportation; and inappropriate instruction, curriculum, materials or context for adult learners. Cognitive-emotive barriers are often less acknowledged by participants themselves but are salient nevertheless. These include lack of confidence, social stigma, learning disabilities and economic marginalization.

Quigley (1993) classifies "resisters" as people who had consciously chosen not to attend literacy programs, though being eligible and available to attend. Based on his research, Quigley identifies a range of barriers, classified into three categories:

› *Situational* – often associated with the demands of adult life, including include lack of transportation, day care, finances, time, or family support;

› *Institutional barriers* – which refer to programmatic limitations such as time and place, bureaucratization (of minor significance); and

› *Dispositional barriers or attitudinal factors* – attitudes based on prior schooling, self-esteem, and a desire for belonging or to be 'at home' in the educational environment (of greater significance and where Quigley identifies an opportunity for practitioners to have 'small victories').

Reflecting Quigley's work, AEEI works with post-secondary institutions to reduce institutional barriers to success, and with ABE instructors to help learners overcome dispositional barriers. Intake and assessment counsellors are encouraged to work with learners to reduce or remove situational barriers, which may include referral to outside agencies.

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[9] Saskatchewan Ministry of Advanced Education, Employment and Immigration, Program Innovation Branch, The Delivery of Adult Basic Education and Literacy Programs in Saskatchewan, July 2010.

For Aboriginal learners, the list of barriers is more complex and lengthy. The CCL (2008) review of literature identifies the following reasons for the gap in education achievement between Aboriginal and other learners (which can be applied to ABE specifically):

> Historical (assimilation policies of education, particularly through but not limited to residential schools);

> Geographic (many Aboriginal people live in remote and/or rural communities away from centres where secondary and post-secondary school programming takes place);

> Cultural (practices in the institutional educational system differ from that Aboriginal culture, particularly in the non-recognition of the role of Spirit in learning);

> Individual and personal barriers (finances, daycare, transportation, histories of trauma and competing priorities such as family, to name a few);

> Systemic (racism, disparities in resources, as well as the policies and practices of Indian; and

> Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) which does not adequately address the high level of need in education.

Addressing barriers to participation and persistence is a key consideration in program policy and design. Approaches may, on the one hand, adjust delivery models to facilitate participation in ABE programs. Alternatively (or in addition) program design may add persistence supports to existing delivery models to address barriers experienced by learners in continuing with their studies.

There is a strong convergence in the literature on removing financial barriers to participation. Financial barriers can be offset through the provision of tuition-free programming, tax relief, student loans, assistance for computer purchases or tutoring. For certain target groups, financial assistance should be available to help participants meet basic living expenses. The cross-jurisdictional review revealed that ABE is offered to participants tuition-free in all provincial/territorial jurisdictions. Instances where income support is available to ABE participants tend to be limited to individuals who are eligible for social assistance programs and in full-time provincially-funded programs (as in Saskatchewan).

Other research to address persistence recommends:

> *Application of adult education principles:* As an example, Imel (1998) takes adult education principles drawn from the literature and applies these to adult basic and literacy education. These include involving adults in program planning and implementation; use of instructional materials that are contextualized, having relevant to learners' lives; targeted instruction based on understanding learners as individuals and members of a group; and incorporating small groups into learning environment.

> *Contact with discontinuants:* Some research highlights the need for policymakers to introduce flexible delivery options and supports to address participation and persistence

barriers in ABE and adult literacy programming by staying in contact with students who are not attending, providing self-study options and encouraging them to return to services when they are able.

> *Individualized approaches.* ABE delivery supports recommended by the CCL (2008) include: individually tailored programs, tied to individuals' academic or career goals; a long-term action plan to support continuous learning; the opportunity to be screened for reading disabilities; special reading activities to assist with correction of reading disability; and more one-on-one instructor support if required by the individual.

3.4 FLEXIBLE DELIVERY

As mentioned above, structural barriers related to program access and inappropriate learning contexts have prompted policymakers and ABE delivery agents to develop programs and supports that provide ways to better accommodate those with literacy challenges.

A number of structural barriers to participation and persistence in ABE programs are related to inappropriate learning contexts. This has prompted policymakers and ABE delivery agents to adjust the adult learning context by introducing flexible and innovative programming. The cross-jurisdictional review of the current program context revealed that most of the provinces and territories have implemented a variety of program delivery models in their ABE programming. The literature indicates that reaching learners requires "a multiplicity of instructional modes (e.g., classes, tutoring, peer learning groups, technology or distance education, and print and media materials) provides students with ways to participate that do not always demand adherence to a regular schedule" (Comings, 2007). A variety of training locations is also used to enhance convenience - colleges (through basic adult education programs), vocational training institutes, private and public workplaces (through partnerships with human resources departments) and community centres (CCL, 2008). Flexibility in the scheduling of courses, such as daytime/evening and weekday/weekend delivery should also be considered. In short "Literacy work needs to build on the communities of interest that are already out there and reach out to people where they have already gathered (or are most likely to gather) and where their learning will feel most comfortable and relevant" (Advisory Committee on Literacy and Essential Skills , 2005).

Another challenge is to offer learners flexible learning environments, while maintaining the proven benefits of structured learning goals and plans. Active learner participation in adult education centres in Europe is promoted on all levels[10]. In several federal states there are elected student representatives. The adult education centre itself can be a place of active citizen commitment. Accordingly, in adult education centres, innovative ways of learning from and with other learners are explored. Many adult education centres make use of study circles, workshops, or open space meetings. Methods presented in the workshops are open, flexible, use varied teaching methods and concentrate on the whole person. Methods

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[10] DVV International, *Livelong Learning in Europe*. 11th German Adult Education Conference. Viviane Reding. 2001.

promoted include "learning with sense and the senses" and "create the world anew while learning" where the individual should agree to the learning process and seek to understand it and not only repeat details.

In the 2005 Ontario Learns review, stakeholders identified a number of adult education best practices, notably the need to deliver education to adults in a flexible learning environment where they are comfortable, where staff respect the learners and there is a sense of community. Also, stakeholders stressed the importance for programming to follow adult learning principles, to use appropriate materials designed for adults and to support adult learners through a holistic delivery approach.

In a scan of college/institute ABE programs by the ACCC (2008), one of the most common characteristics noted is that they are offered on a continuous intake basis throughout the school year, enabling learners an opportunity to begin their program every two weeks or at the beginning of each month during the academic year (ACCC, 2008). Respondent colleges and institutes emphasized the importance of flexible stop-out and start-up options so that if learners need to temporarily withdraw from their program (due to personal, family or health challenges), they are able to do so.

The scan of colleges and institutes identified a number of other innovative approaches:

> Douglas College offers community-based tutoring to work with people who cannot attend class, up to a Grade 5 level.

> Northwest Community College among others is funded by the BC government to deliver a program called the Community Adult Literacy Program in partnership with a community agency. As part of its responsibilities, the college administers a literacy grant to different organizations within the community.

3.5 TECHNOLOGY-ENHANCED LEARNING

With relatively high rates of internet connectivity (more limited in remote areas), e-learning offers a possible avenue to further enhance the flexibility and reach of ABE programs. Early reviews by HRSDC (2000) noted that the use of technology-enhanced learning in ABE programs did not affect achievement and that there were other advantages in terms of acquiring computer skills, meeting privacy preferences, fast feedback and meeting student interest. Statistics Canada (2003) also found that computer and internet usage is strongly associated with improved literacy skill and higher earnings. In 2005, ABC Canada released a document *Linking Adult Literacy and e-Learning* that provides an inventory of e-learning tools in adult literacy, including a review of their use and effectiveness. The e-learning tools that were reviewed covered basic literacy and computer skills activities in programs involving tutors and mentors, interactive software, on-line or e-Portfolios, and Web logging.

While there is little in the Canadian literature on the effective use of technology in ABE/ literacy programming, researchers in the US have recently explored this issue in some detail (Warschauer, M and Meei-Ling Liaw, 2010; Council for Advancement of Adult Literacy, 2009; Silver-Pacuilla, 2008). While

cautious about recommending the widespread and uncritical use of technology in literacy education, this research does note that "learners at even the lowest levels of literacy and language proficiency can engage with online learning content". Learners themselves indicate that they are eager and motivated to gain computer literacy skills. In addition to literacy gains, this literature brings forward a number of other benefits, notably: increasing access to literacy education by enhancing flexibility and using a wider variety of learning modalities; enhancing the power, creativity and relevance of the learning experience; support interaction among learners and between learners and instructors, while increasing learner autonomy; enhanced self-confidence, self-directedness and independence; and non-traditional means by which literacy and language skills can be developed through authentic communication, collaboration, networking and scaffolding for learners who have experienced difficulties with traditional education. That said, other research urges caution and an emphasis on multi-mode delivery to continue to address the needs of some groups (e.g., older men) who do not respond positively to e-learning or for whom access to e-resources is limited (Centre for Literacy of Quebec, 2009).

There is some experience in Canada with online learning. For example, in BC, LearnNowBC offers online ABE programming for students, as does Alberta and Ontario through AlphaRoute/Independent Learning Centres. Pilots of online ABE programming are taking place in Ontario (at Collège Boréal and Confederation College), leading to a recommendation in a review of the Ontario adult education system that the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (MTCU) fund the development of a provincial initiative involving leaders in online delivery of Academic Upgrading to develop a future-focused strategy to accelerate the online delivery of Academic Upgrading courses across the province (Ontario College Sector Committee for Adult Upgrading, 2006). The use of adaptive technologies to accommodate the needs of learners with disabilities is another recommendation in the literature on adult ICT and distance training.

There have been successes related to the integration of technology within the classroom for adult literacy programs in Massachusetts (Brinkman, et al, 2000). These include increasing the availability of computers in program sites based on a principle that integration of technology is a key component for successful adult education. While the 2000 Massachusetts evaluation found that more time and training was needed for teachers to be able to implement use of computers and technology in the classroom, both teachers and learners agreed that there was great benefit to computer use in ABE learning. When asked why it is important to have technology skills, learners articulated their belief that they need these skills for success in today's world. Learner comments on the topic included: "Technology skills are one of the basic skills for modern life." "It is a competitive world and you need to be prepared." "It is very important for me because if I have technology skills I will have good opportunities at the future." Adult learners see that technology will help them be prepared for the future. They also see it as a tool to help them learn better with 59% of the learners surveyed strongly agreeing with the statement that "using technology helps me learn better."

3.6   PARTNERSHIPS

In Canada, ABE and adult literacy programs are delivered in partnership with third parties – typically community-based organizations, colleges and school boards. Employers/industry/organized labour may also partner in the delivery of ABE through workplace initiatives. As noted in the cross-jurisdictional review, service delivery partners vary across provinces and territories. In Quebec, school boards are the prevalent delivery organization, whereas in British Columbia and Nova Scotia, community colleges play a significant role. Delivery in other provinces is more mixed.

There is a gap in the literature, however, as to what kinds of partnered delivery is more effective. For the most part, the research emphasized the importance of diversity in offerings and ensuring that program scheduling, location and modes of delivery maximize opportunities for participation of adult learners. One exception is a review by the OECD (2002) that examined delivery of ABE in various jurisdictions across Canada, comparing community-based delivery with institutional delivery. While noting that there were few studies of ABE effectiveness, their conclusion – that hybrid or transition programs in education mainstream institutions have more promise than unstructured community-based approaches – was based on concerns about a lack of accredited training or mechanisms to transfer students from ABE to regular high school or college programs.

Partnerships and collaborative networks among service providers is an element in the overall program environment that is worthy of consideration. Coordination of programming and information sharing among deliverers has benefits for avoiding duplication and sharing of tools, resources and best practices.

There is also some literature about the challenges for adult literacy as a sector – characterized as a 'poor cousin' to institution-based learning, with limited professional development (Movement for Canadian Literacy, 2007). In addition, there can be capacity issues for community-based organizations, in particular, who are reliant on volunteers and unstably project-based funding that strains the resources of the organization (due to the demands of applying for and reporting on funding) and also undermines staffing and continuity of service. Multi-year funding agreements, based on a consensus between funder and recipient on expectations for outcomes and deliverables is often raised as a beneficial practice for grants and contributions programs.[11]

Collaboration is seen as a best and even necessary practice in the delivery of ABE – a concept strongly promoted in BC's recent efforts to improve literacy levels in the province: "the recipe above all else for successful literacy programming is collaboration" (Literacy Now, 2005) There is even greater convergence in the literature on the trend toward increased integration among organizations delivering ABE (at least at the community level) and on the importance of collaborations to provide a holistic access to services for adult learners and to maximize the use of resources and expertise.

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[11] As an example, the Report of the Independent Blue Ribbon Panel on Grant and Contribution Programs recommended that Treasury Board encourage the multi-year funding of projects that are multi-year in nature.

3.7 ADULT BASIC EDUCATION AND WORKPLACE SKILLS

There are two threads in the literature around ABE and workplace skills. The first is around fostering a closer integration between literacy and occupational skills learning in the classroom. According to HRSDC (2000) "the amount of time needed for skill improvement may be decreased by half when targeted programs use materials learners use in everyday work". The ACCC (2008) argues that, to the extent possible, occupationally related materials should be included in literacy and adult upgrading curricula. "Integrated approaches that combine literacy, adult upgrading, college preparatory courses and post-secondary courses are essential to facilitate transitions and enhance opportunities for success". This theme is echoed in the literature on youth transition programming that shows that occupational learning connected with academic learning is a key feature of successful youth transition programs (CCL, 2008). The integration of ABE and workplace skills is being implemented in Saskatchewan in a series of projects located in post-secondary institutions under the Essential Skills For the Workplace Program and the Workplace Essential Skills Saskatchewan Program.

In the state of Washington, a program called I-BEST (Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training) embodies this best practice by pairing ESL or ABE teachers with professional-technical instructors in the classroom to concurrently provide students with literacy education and workforce skills. An evaluation of the I-BEST program for ESL students found that they earned five times more college credits on average and were 15 times more likely to complete workforce training than were traditional ESL students during the same amount of time.

Similarly, experience in Germany found that vocational curriculum should not only focus on technical skills but should also include an element of soft skills. Personal and interpersonal competencies such as self-confidence, persistence, self-motivation, team work skills, and confidence are essential factors of "employability". The link to the labour market and the soft skills to enhance employability and job retention were both found to contribute to employment success for unemployed and under employed individuals.

A second thread is locating literacy training in the workplace. According to Maxwell (2010), 70 per cent of people with low literacy skills are employed, making the workplace a natural location for program delivery. Reviews of the literature on workplace literacy by the CCSD (2006) and Centre for Literacy of Quebec (2009) concluded that the (mostly qualitative) evidence on the benefits of workplace literacy programs were consistently positive. Workplace literacy programs improved skills, and also provided a boost to employees' confidence, which, in turn, led to improvements in other aspects of the workplace such as communications and problem-solving. According to the Centre for Literacy of Quebec, best practices in workplace literacy include:

> ❯ *Program level:* employer commitment, a culture of learning, stakeholder collaboration, and careful planning and design from needs assessment to evaluation;

> ❯ *Delivery level:* flexible, customized, contextualized, use blended learning approaches appropriate to diverse learners, control quality, and evaluation at all stages;

> ❯ *Government level:* engagement at the policy level to promote, support and guide strategies, and to provide financial and other systemic supports; and

> ❯ *Evaluation:* mixed qualitative-quantitative approaches to evaluation to measure or capture both learner and employer outcomes in the workplace, family, community, and society at large.

In Canada, many provinces have workplace literacy programs. Workplace Essential Skills (WES) programs in New Brunswick and Alberta are examples. In Saskatchewan, the Workplace Essential Skills Saskatchewan Program has been in place since 2008. These programs provide an accelerated path of on-site/customized training for lower skilled/educated adults using the nine HRSDC essential skills. The program is delivered in partnership with employers, CBOs, band/tribal councils, and post-secondary institutions. Workplace Education PEI is similarly based on a partnership with employers and labour. Support is provided by the program to assess the learning needs of employees, recommend essential skills programming and monitor implementation. Manitoba and Nova Scotia also have well-established workplace literacy programs (Workplace Education Manitoba and the Workplace Education Initiative in Nova Scotia). Both provinces are currently participating in a project to develop an evaluation model to measure the long-term impacts of literacy and basic skills initiatives in the workplace for both learners and organizations.

3.8 TARGETED PROGRAMMING FOR UNDERREPRESENTED GROUPS

There are a number of examples in the literature of research on highly targeted interventions, specifically, to underrepresented or disadvantaged groups such as Aboriginal learners. The 2000 HRSDC review of literacy programs concluded that "the impact of literacy programs can be improved with better targeting, for example, for offenders, families, employed and unemployed workers, adult upgrading students, adults with learning disabilities, and others. Other research generally supports the value of customized approaches for Aboriginal learners that: feature holistic programming; meet the needs of remote learners; and support First Nations' educators and practitioners. Programs in the provinces and territories reflect this best practice to a large degree. Many jurisdictions have strategies targeted to Aboriginal learners, for example, or remote learners.

A literature review conducted by the CCL (George, 2008) concluded that "Aboriginal literacy/education practitioners are having successes with learners/students through using culturally-relevant/culture-based approaches that respond to individual and community aspirations/needs and that are grounded in research. The report recommended that Aboriginal literacy/education stakeholders systematically document these successes of learners – spiritual, emotional, mental and physical – and be compensated for work with learners that the institutional educational system has failed.

3.9   ACCOUNTABILITY

In general, systematic evaluation of adult literacy policies, programs and practices using appropriate tools is identified as a promising or best practice (HRSDC, 2000; Conference Board of Canada, 2006). There are, however, no common evaluation frameworks or reference tools for literacy practices available or in use in Canada (Canadian Education Statistics Council, 2007).

A notable challenge that has developed as a result of the increased attention on adult literacy is an underlying tension in the positioning of literacy within broader social or economic concerns. The former perspective emphasizes the importance of literacy in citizenship, community and family participation, while the latter emphasizes the importance of literacy in employment and work contexts.

With respect to program accountability, locating literacy within broader economic or labour market policies has had the effect of narrowing the indicators of program success. The National Reporting System in the United States is a case in point where funded literacy organizations framed reporting around three core indicators: educational gains; entering or retaining employment; and placement in postsecondary education or passing the GED test. This narrow conception of monitoring and assessment can have a negative effect on literacy programming itself (adjusted to meet reporting frameworks) or lead practitioners to "game the numbers" or leave the field altogether (Jackson, 2004). Literacy advocates, practitioners and learners themselves tend to take a broader view of the impact of literacy interventions that include impacts on confidence and self-esteem and how they use literacy in their everyday lives.

Equipped for the Future is an effort in the United States to broaden the ways ABE is assessed. This national standards-based system reform initiative, sponsored by the National Institute for Literacy and based on stakeholder consultation, will provide a common framework for defining, tracking, and reporting results to policymakers, as well as to students and their local programs.

Merrifield (1998) recommended four principles that would enhance performance and accountability in the literacy field:

1. Agree on performance, including involving stakeholders and be reflective of the newer understandings of literacy ("multiple literacies", practice-based).
2. Build mutual accountability relationships, based on transparency and free flow of information with broad representation.
3. Develop capacity both to perform and be accountable, referring to resources and know-how both to deliver programs and report on them.
4. Create new tools to measure performance, including various types of indicators to track program inputs, process and performance.

3.10 RESEARCH

Focused attention on literacy and basic skills has inspired parallel research work in the area. Literacy research strategies and frameworks have been developed in Australia and the United States. In Canada, an initiative led initially by British Columbia – Research in Practice – reflects a concerted effort to forge a closer alignment between the theoretical knowledge base for adult literacy with the experience of practitioners.[12] This link is embedded in a co-ordinated research program and is anticipated to lead to improvements in adult literacy learning.

Research in practice projects are occurring in many provinces now including Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario and, Nova Scotia. In Saskatchewan, a Research-in-Practice Project was undertaken in 2008 in partnership with Saskatchewan Literacy Network (SLN) and Saskatchewan Adult Basic Education Association (SABEA), which included the development of a train-the-trainer manual, as well as handbooks for practitioners and ABE administrators.

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[12] See for example, Focused on Practice: A Framework for Adult Literacy Research in Canada, Jenny Horsman & Helen Woodrow, Editors, 2006.

4. SUMMARY OBSERVATIONS

This review on the delivery of ABE has identified a number of cross-jurisdictional policy and program delivery approaches and promising practices in the delivery of basic skills and literacy education. The research indicates that adults can enhance their essential and literacy skills through learning and practice. However, the research also indicates that to be effective, policy makers need to find ways to increase program outreach and access to encourage participation, while program delivery models need to incorporate mechanism that improve the learning experience for adult learners. Key observations include:

> Increasing outreach and access to encourage participation

  ◇ An overarching premise in adult education is that learners need to be encouraged to participate in ABE programs; this has led to a growing emphasis on multi-channel marketing (i.e., multi-media, multi-source dissemination points).

  ◇ Formal referral protocols can increase awareness and outreach both among service providers and ABE learners.

  ◇ Formal assessments of learner's skills, abilities and prior learning should be used to properly assess individual learning needs and facilitate measurement of progress. However, effective assessment methods should also include an appraisal of informal prior learning (e.g., life and work skills) as well as socio-economic and personal factors to enhance program effectiveness and learner success.

  ◇ Addressing barriers to participation and persistence is a key consideration in effective ABE policy and program design. Flexible delivery models (e.g., evening/weekend courses, continuous intake) and the provision of financial assistance (e.g., tuition-free, materials, transportation, childcare) represent two generally accepted methods used to facilitate access and encourage participation in ABE programs.

  ◇ A variety of learning locations options (e.g., colleges, vocational training centres, workplace, community-based organizations) can increase participation and retention rates and extend program reach.

> Improving the learning experience for individuals

  ◇ Traditional learning materials and environments can represent barriers to participation and persistence in ABE programs. The introduction of flexible and innovative programming can help to create appropriate learning contexts that reflect the needs of adult learners.

- ◇ Active learner participation in adult education centres can help to create a more flexible learning environment that promotes learner involvement and a sense of community, while maintaining the proven benefits of structured learning goals and plans.

- ◇ Research indicates that effective adult education should follow adult learning principles, provide a comfortable and respectful environment, and use appropriate and/or occupational related materials designed for adults.

- ◇ ABE programs that provide a pathway into a training program, academic credit or occupational certification can increase the perceived value and motivation of learners.

- ◇ Integration of technology in the delivery of ABE programs is both effective in extending the reach and flexibility of delivery, and provides opportunities for training in technology skills that are highly valued by adult learners.

- ◇ The provision of adult counselling and support services help to reinforce student retention and success among learners.

- ◇ Creating specific programs and supports that respect and build on the cultural values and needs of targeted groups (e.g., Aboriginal groups, minority languages, youth, seniors) is a promising practice.

Appendix A
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APPENDIX B
LISTS OF BEST PRACTICES –
LITERACY, ABE, ADULT LEARNING

Suggestions for government action in literacy advancement
Source: Best Practices National Workshop on Literacy, October 2002.

1. Expand the role and resources of the National Literacy Secretariat.
2. Increase secured funding (from government).
3. Raise awareness and heighten the profile of literacy.
4. Define literacy and deepen understanding. (Make it inclusive.)
5. Develop a national public awareness campaign. Enhance the transfer of information and knowledge (using technology and plain language).
6. Develop a national system and strategy (a policy framework) for literacy and adult learning.
7. Integrate the literacy issue into all government departments. (Move beyond best practices.)
8. Create a process for planning and implementing the integration of literacy with other issues (e.g., health, Aboriginal affairs, justice).
9. Develop measurements for accountability and outcomes.
10. Build capacity for research and collaboration.
11. Take a holistic approach to recruiting more learners to programs.
12. Obtain funding and support from business and other stakeholders.
13. Support communities and families to plan literacy activities (Leslie, LCNB e-mail).

Best Practices Criteria
Source: Council of the Federation, 2004

- *Accessibility* – location easy to reach and to enter, safe, appropriate scheduling

- *Affordability* – tuition-free, financial assistance, book supply or depository

- *Accountability* – to all involved in program, results relate to program objectives

- *Adaptability* – flexible in changing needs and conditions, innovator

- *Appropriateness* – of instructional ratios, approaches and materials for learners

- *Awareness* – of learners' needs, of referral and community services, promotion

- *Bridging Arrangements* – knowledge of other programs and sensitive referrals

- *Community Context* – different cultures situated within locale, community relations

- *Participation* – involve learners in other program activities and volunteers and staff

- *Partnerships* – collaboration with other community and business partners, etc.

- *Replicability* – awareness of any adaptations that may be required; start small

- *Resources* – physical, financial, instructional and human – adequate for need

- *Respect* – for individuals, for diverse cultures, language, rage and religion, etc.

- **Staff Training** – appropriate training and experience for the job for paid staff and volunteers

Key Literacy Program Success Factors
Source: Conference Board of Canada, 2006

Area	Program Success Factor
Environment	1. Create a positive learning environment
Systematic delivery	2. Establish systems to meet literacy and other needs of learners
Planning	3. Establish the mission, vision, and program plan before starting the program
Financial resources	4. Funding should be sustainable and from diverse sources
Administration	5. Establish strong management systems
Curriculum	6. Design an effective curriculum
Human resources	7. Recruit, train, and support committed instructions and volunteers
Learning strategies	8. Use the best mix of learning strategies
Outreach	9. Build connections with the community
Learner retention	10. Engage and motivate learners
Assessment	11. Evaluate programs and learners frequently using appropriate tools

Adult Literacy in Canada: Lessons Learned
Source: HRSDC, 2000

1. Adult literacy programs benefit both individuals and society, but these benefits have not been fully realized due to low levels of public interest and political support.

2. Experiences suggest how to design and deliver good adult literacy programs, but conditions don't always exist to allow that to happen.

3. Evidence suggests considerable advantages in using learning technologies in adult literacy programs, but there is room for improvement.

4. Adult literacy programs aimed at specific target groups appear to have better results, but such programs are not delivered consistently in an effective, efficient or equitable manner.

5. Adults in need of upgrading face barriers that make it difficult to enter or remain in literacy programs.

6. It is important that adult literacy learners have a say in policies and programs addressing their needs.

7.   More systematic evaluation of adult literacy policies, programs and practices is needed to increase accountability and to improve the knowledge base in the field.

Key Characteristics of an Effective Adult Learning System
Source: CPRN, 2007

Learner-centred

▪ Educational institutions have a client-service orientation.

▪ Individuals are able to choose their own path (supported by accessible information and advice).

Goal-directed

▪ Adult learning is designed to achieve specific goals. Adult learners have access to assistance in articulating goals that are appropriate for them.

▪ Goals of adult learning extend beyond labour market outcomes (employment, earnings) to include active, engaged citizens who are able to contribute to the development of their communities. However, the link to productivity is important.

Coordinated/Seamless

▪ Learners are able to enter the system at any point and be assisted in finding their way to the service that is appropriate for them.

▪ Consistent need assessment tools are in place across the system.

Aligned

▪ The activities of different programs complement (and do not impede) the objectives of each.

Articulated

▪ Credits offered by different institutions/providers are recognized across the system.

Collaborative

▪ Deliverers of adult training and employment services, as well as government departments and agencies, work together (and with clients) to meet client needs.

Affordable

▪ Financial assistance allows individuals seeking learning opportunities to be able to participate, whether or not they are eligible for Employment Insurance (EI). Montreal participants felt that there should be no cost to participate in programs that provide basic competencies.

▪ Employers are offered financial incentives to invest in learning programs.

Cost-effective

- Programs are cost-effective from the perspective of all payers (e.g., governments, employers).

Equitable

- There is active outreach to disadvantaged groups to facilitate their participation in learning activities.

Transparent

- Evidence on the impact of programs is accessible.

Accountable

- Learning programs are evaluation and outcomes are report.

Relevant

- Skills that are acquired are valued by employers and/or in the community.

Balanced between Flexibility and Structure

- Courses are available at times and places convenient for adult learners. (For those who have jobs, this means availability of courses taking the workplace context into account.)
- Flexibility is balanced by the need for structure: it will not always be feasible to tailor a course to the individuals.

Sustainable

- There is adequate and stable funding to support a comprehensive, integrated adult learning system.

Visible

- There is widespread awareness of adult learning opportunities.
- People know where to go to enter the system.

Connected to Youth Education

- Adult learning programs are connected to a continuous learning system (i.e., learning for young people and adult learning is seamless).

Available in Community

- Programs are available locally. Francophones are able to access programs in French. (Noted in particular at the Montreal roundtable which brought together representatives of the Francophone communities in Atlantic Canada and Ontario, in addition to representatives for the province of Quebec.)

Attractive to Adult Learners

- Service providers actively seek to encourage potential learners, who may lack confidence about participating in learning programs as adults.

Respectful of Adult Circumstances

- Programs build on competencies already acquired, including those gained through experience. Programs respect that adult learners have different constraints (family and financial responsibilities) than younger learners.

Recommendations, International Plan of Action for the United Nations Literacy Decade
Source: UNESCO, 2003

- giving equal importance to formal and non-formal education modalities;

- promoting an environment supportive of literacy and a culture of reading in schools and communities;

- ensuring community involvement in literacy programmes as well as their local ownership;

- building partnerships particularly at the national level, but also at subregional, regional and international levels, between government, civil society, the private sector and local communities; and

- developing at all levels systematic monitoring and assessment supported by research and data collection.

Measures of Success: Workplace Literacy and Essential Skills, 2010
Source: Centre for Literacy of Quebec 2010

Many discussions, studies and initiatives connected to strengthening LES in the workforce in the past twenty years have allowed us to identify a cluster of best practice components related to the design, implementation and sustainability of workplace LES training programs.

> *Program level:* employer commitment, a culture of learning, stakeholder collaboration, and careful planning and design from needs assessment to evaluation;

> *Delivery level:* flexible, customized, contextualized, use blended learning approaches appropriate to diverse learners, control quality, and evaluation at all stages; and

> *Government level:* engagement at the policy level to promote, support and guide strategies, and to provide financial and other systemic supports; and

> ❯ *Evaluation:* approach to evaluation to measure or capture both learner and employer outcomes in the workplace, family, community, and society at large.

It's time to Reboot Education for Adults with Low Literacy Skills, Maxwell (2010)
Source: Elements of Literacy Strategy

The key components of a sustainable and seamless system for literacy development would include:

> ❯ An ambitious goal to raise the share of the population with Level 3 literacy skills over five to ten years.

> ❯ A robust curriculum framework, like the Stages Curriculum in Manitoba, which creates logical pathways for students moving from programs offered by community organizations, to school boards, colleges, workplaces and others.

> ❯ Recognition by all institutions of the credits awarded by others in the system within the curriculum framework.

> ❯ A policy framework which integrates literacy development with community economic and social development. This means that community-based organizations must become a valued and integral part of the provincial literacy effort.

> ❯ Creative targeting of programs to disadvantaged populations with unique needs – lone parents, immigrants, young drop-pouts, offenders and so on.

> ❯ Financial and professional development systems which give community-based organizations the capacity to plan for the medium-term and to design programs which are responsive to local needs.

> ❯ A student identifier number which permits effective program management and continuing improvement in program design.

Using Adult Learning Principles in Adult Basic and Literacy Education,
Recommendations for Practice
Source: Susan Imel, 1998

> ❯ Involve adults in program planning and implementation

> ❯ Develop and/or use instructional materials that are based on students' lives

> ❯ Develop an understanding of learners' experiences and communities

> ❯ Incorporate small groups into learning activities.