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## Monitoring and assessing learner progress ... & using the community literacy benchmarks

In the world today, an emphasis on accountability is leading to a focus on 'results' in the public sector, including the literacy field. Terms such as monitoring, assessment, benchmarks and outcomes, among others, are part of a new vocabulary we are learning to describe community literacy work. For the first time, benchmarks have been developed for the community literacy sector, and programs funded by the Community Adult Literacy Program of the BC government are required to use them to assess and report on learner progress. (A similar process has been happening in the college and school district literacy sectors.)

But assessment should not be primarily about accountability.

Its true purpose is to inform learning and teaching. Assessment for learning – as opposed to assessment of learning – deepens our understanding of how learners learn and what they know. Assessment for learning starts from and builds on strengths and is part of a values-based approach that reflects the philosophy underlying community literacy. At the heart of that philosophy is a dynamic view of literacy as enabling participation in social, economic, family and community life. Performance on standardized tests cannot measure the range and complexity of how adults use literacy in their lives. Instead, practitioners and tutors need access to a variety of assessment tools to respond to the unique needs and goals of their learners.



Long Term Personal Learning Goal	Level 1 Short Term Personal Learning Goal	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5	Overall Completion
Participant has identified a long term personal learning goal	Participant has identified a short term personal learning goal	Participant has developed a plan for achieving their short term personal learning goal	Participant has completed two or more of the activities in their short term personal learning goal	Successfully completed two or more of activities Participant has successfully completed two or more of the activities in order to complete their short term personal learning goal.	Successfully completed all activities and achieved their personal learning goal	
				Date activity was completed	Date all activities completed	
				Skills developed/ applied during the completion of the activity	Skills developed/applied during the completion of the activity	
					March 3, 2007	✓
					Purchasing food Following recipe directions	✓
	#1 Learn how to cook nutritious meal					✓
						✓

What did you learn as you were doing this work? How will you use what you've learned?  
When I first decided that I wanted to change how we ate so that we could be much healthier I thought it would be just cooking different food. But when I started taking their recipes I found out about their favorite foods, and what they liked to eat when they were kids and that what I thought was Chinese food was really American. So now when recipes I've got and then I make a grocery list and then go to the store. Did you know that at the store they keep all the fresh stuff like fruit and milk and eggs on the outside and dead, like canned beans and chips? So now I am amazed that I can cook better food by choosing stuff from the outside area and spending money on that first.

*In this issue of the ELMO newsletter, we bring you information about assessment tools and resources you will find useful in community literacy work. We also bring you voices from the literacy field. Literacy practitioners talk about the tools they use in their programs and the successes and challenges they have experienced.*

### Quick guide to community literacy benchmarks

Learn more about BC's community literacy benchmarks at <http://www.literacybc.ca/Research/benchmarks.php>

## Best practice ... practitioners share the assessment tools they use with their learners



**Emily Hunter (left, ELMO Project Coordinator) approached three BC practitioners to find out about the tried and tested assessment tools they use with their learners.**

**Carol Nielsen (right)** works as an instructor, program developer and coordinator of CALL, a community-based literacy program at Capilano University's Sunshine Coast campus. She has been working at the university for nine years and works primarily with marginalized learners with low literacy skills who face challenges in their everyday lives.



### What tools do you use to assess learners?

It depends very much on the learner I am working with. I have used the Canadian Language Benchmark's "Can Do" statements for ESL learners and found them to be very effective. They allow the learner to begin by identifying all the things they can do rather than beginning with what they can't. Once I used these statements by mistake with a young man with very low literacy skills. I had intended to use a different assessment tool but afterwards I reflected that I had unintentionally used the 'right' one for him.

I also use the Computer Literacy Self-Assessment developed in January 2009 by the Sunshine Coast Lighthouse Learning Network. Tutors use this with learners in the CALL program who want to improve their computer literacy. There are 19 areas and a four point scale. It begins with "Where am I now?" and "Where do I want to be?"

I have also used the spinners developed by Lucy Alderson and Betsy Alkenbrack who work at the Carnegie Learning Centre in the Downtown Eastside of Vancouver for Capilano University. (A spinner is a paper circle with different written statements on it. Only one statement shows at a time as you "spin" the wheel.) These spinners allow learners to determine what they can do in a number of different domains (reading, writing, etc.). I have used this several times with a group of learners who wanted to pass the written part of the driving test; a few of them had failed the test many times. I also used the spinners with a man in his twenties with Down Syndrome who is matched with an 80 year old CALL tutor. We used the spinner to assess his levels in a number of domains. Both learner and tutor found this useful and engaging. I have also used the checklist (basic, proficient, strong) at the back of the Benchmarks Checklist.

### How are you using these tools with the Community Literacy Benchmarks?

I have found using assessment tools quite interesting. At times I have felt empowered and at other times somewhat frustrated by the search required for good tools. I am learning more about what is available and need to link more with other colleagues. The process has encouraged me to ask questions about what we want to know and how we can assess learners. It is time-consuming and it is a process that will be ongoing. Several learners have said they find the assessment useful since it will track progress and creates possibilities for celebrating progress and success. It would be wonderful if there were a central place with examples of good assessment tools for all domains: reading, writing, math, oral, group participation and computer literacy. I am slowly collecting examples so we have a few to choose from.

### Canadian Language Benchmarks "Can Do" checklists

[https://www.elmoreviews.ca/product\\_view.php?id=433](https://www.elmoreviews.ca/product_view.php?id=433)

[http://www.language.ca/display\\_page.asp?page\\_id=372](http://www.language.ca/display_page.asp?page_id=372)

### Computer Literacy Self-Assessment

[https://www.elmoreviews.ca/product\\_view.php?id=449](https://www.elmoreviews.ca/product_view.php?id=449)

[https://www.elmoreviews.ca/newsletters/computer\\_literacy.pdf](https://www.elmoreviews.ca/newsletters/computer_literacy.pdf)

### Spinners: Monitoring Tools for Learning in a Group Setting

[https://www.elmoreviews.ca/product\\_view.php?id=428](https://www.elmoreviews.ca/product_view.php?id=428)

[http://ripal.literacy.bc.ca/fromthegroundup/2\\_1\\_CARNEGIE\\_spinners.pdf](http://ripal.literacy.bc.ca/fromthegroundup/2_1_CARNEGIE_spinners.pdf)

### Benchmarks Checklists

[https://www.elmoreviews.ca/product\\_view.php?id=450](https://www.elmoreviews.ca/product_view.php?id=450)

[http://www.literacybc.ca/Research/MandA/Benchmarks\\_and\\_checklists.pdf](http://www.literacybc.ca/Research/MandA/Benchmarks_and_checklists.pdf)

### Assessing all aspects of community literacy

Five community literacy programs across the province each developed a unique tool to document and measure some of the changes they hoped to achieve in their practice. Each tool focuses on a particular aspect of community literacy, from assessing learners to assessing community partnership development. Together they speak to the depth and range of community literacy work. These tools, developed for "From the Ground Up," a project of RiPAL-BC and Literacy BC, can be found at:

<http://www.ripal.literacy.bc.ca/fromthegroundup/default.html>

They are summarized on **page 4**.

## Best practice ... practitioners share the assessment tools they use with their learners (... /cont.)

**Melanie Sondergaard's** background is in community development and international development. She has been working at the Learning Shop in Hazelton for the last eight years and has just completed her Masters of Education at the University of Victoria. Her thesis was focused on active citizenship in rural communities with young adults.

### What tools do you use to assess learners?

We use the Adult Goal Progress Chart and Monitoring Tool that was developed as part of the "From the Ground Up" project.

We find it useful because it's tangible and it is a learning tool as well as a monitoring tool. It's obvious that it was created by practitioners because it's so easy to use.

#### Adult Goal Progress Chart & Monitoring Tool

[http://www.elmoreviews.ca/product\\_view.php?id=415](http://www.elmoreviews.ca/product_view.php?id=415)  
<http://www.nald.ca/library/learning/groundup/mtagpc/cover.htm>



We have also developed a home-grown tool that we use with many of our learners. It's a poster created by youth in our community who, as part of a research project, explored the importance of developing a sense of personal power in their lives before they could engage politically. Personal power includes Spirituality (connection, rituals, ceremony, expression, symbols), Curiosity (global, community, cultural diversity, multi-generational, desire for knowledge), Identity (history, present, future), Self-Awareness (interests, qualities, areas to develop), Confidence (try new things, humour, courage, motivation), Relationships (respectful, diverse, purposeful, emotional, boundaries, trust) and Reflective (dreams, considers, thinks – critical, creative, connects). We use this poster to create weekly or monthly goals with learners. They identify one area that they want to work on, and turn this into a learning goal. At reflection each week, they then name the elements of personal power fostered over the previous week. It's really useful because it was created by the community for the community.

#### Personal Power Poster

[http://www.elmoreviews.ca/product\\_view.php?id=451](http://www.elmoreviews.ca/product_view.php?id=451)  
 Available for \$10+postage from [melanie@upperskeena.ca](mailto:melanie@upperskeena.ca)

#### Collaboration Maps

[http://www.elmoreviews.ca/product\\_view.php?id=452](http://www.elmoreviews.ca/product_view.php?id=452)  
[http://ripal.literacy.bc.ca/fromthegroundup/2\\_3\\_CBAL\\_MTools.doc](http://ripal.literacy.bc.ca/fromthegroundup/2_3_CBAL_MTools.doc)

We also use collaboration maps adapted from the "From the Ground Up" project. We write the learner's name on the wall, and they add the names of people they have built relationships with over the course of the month or year. These can be other learners, service providers, tutors or community members. Learners then draw a physical web with string to show the relationships being accessed at this time and the relationships they are building. This is important because we want to measure the development of their social networks.

### How are you using these tools with the Community Literacy Benchmarks?

We find that the Adult Goal Progress Chart and Monitoring Tool translates well to the Community Literacy Benchmarks.

### Assessment tools to use with the community literacy benchmarks

These tools have proven most useful when working with learners and using the community literacy benchmarks. What has worked for you? Log on and add your experience at [www.ELMOverviews.ca](http://www.ELMOverviews.ca).

#### Canadian Adult Reading Assessment (CARA)

[https://www.elmoreviews.ca/product\\_view.php?id=273](https://www.elmoreviews.ca/product_view.php?id=273)

#### Adult Goal Progress Chart and Monitoring Tool

[https://www.elmoreviews.ca/product\\_view.php?id=415](https://www.elmoreviews.ca/product_view.php?id=415)

## New resources to borrow from Literacy BC's Provincial Literacy Resource Centre

At Literacy BC's Resource Centre you'll find an extensive list of books, audio-visuals and websites. They include curricula, DVDs, books on current issues, tutor resources, novels for learners, and more. Anyone in BC can borrow materials, at no cost, by mail.

For new resources that you can borrow, go to <http://www2.literacy.bc.ca/resources/newresc.htm> or search the online catalogue at <http://www2.literacy.bc.ca/catalogue> and order your loans online.

## Best practice ... practitioners share the assessment tools they use with their learners (... /cont.)

**Margaret Sutherland** has been working in literacy since 1999. She began as a volunteer and today works for the Columbia Basin Alliance for Literacy as the Castlegar Community Coordinator and shares the position of Regional Literacy Coordinator at Selkirk College with Christy Luke.



### What tools do you use to assess learners?

I use Pat Campbell's Canadian Adult Reading Assessment. I also use a writing sample to assess a student's level and to see how well a student can communicate in writing.

**Canadian Adult Reading Assessment**  
[http://www.elmoreviews.ca/product\\_view.php?id=273](http://www.elmoreviews.ca/product_view.php?id=273)

**Authentic Assessments** I believe in using authentic ('real life') assessment tools with learners. Sometimes, just seeing how the student approaches the forms that need to be filled out tells me a lot about the level they are at. The process of assessing a learner is an assessment in itself.

**Computer Self-Assessment** I teach computer training to seniors. I use a self-assessment with these students; I ask them to tell me what they can do and provide them with opportunities to show me what they can do. A lot of assessment is based on asking the student to do something and then assessing the results.

### How are you using these tools with the Community Literacy Benchmarks?

I use them first to assess the learner and then I match the learner's level up to the Community Literacy Benchmarks. As Pat Campbell's work was the foundation for the benchmarks, it makes sense to me to use her Canadian Adult Reading Assessment.

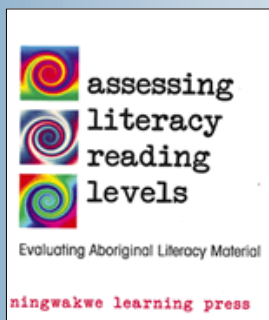
## Assessing all aspects of community literacy

Here are a variety of tools for assessing all aspects of literacy, developed for "From the Ground Up" (see box, page 2).

Assessment Tool	Developer	Location	Focus of Program
<p><b>Learning in a Group Setting.</b> Three rubrics capture the learning and literacy skills learners acquire in non-formal, alternative learning groups. The rubrics measure progression in skills, attitude, and behaviour in a group setting among individual learners, emerging peer tutors, and learning groups. The information on the rubrics is also presented in a learner-friendly format as "spinners."</p> <p>Rubrics: <a href="http://ripal.literacy.bc.ca/fromthegroundup/2_1_CARNEGIE_MTools_Final.doc">http://ripal.literacy.bc.ca/fromthegroundup/2_1_CARNEGIE_MTools_Final.doc</a>            Spinners: <a href="http://ripal.literacy.bc.ca/fromthegroundup/2_1_CARNEGIE_spinners.pdf">http://ripal.literacy.bc.ca/fromthegroundup/2_1_CARNEGIE_spinners.pdf</a></p>	Literacy Inreach/ Outreach Program of Carnegie Learning Centre	Urban Downtown Eastside of Vancouver	Outreach literacy with marginalized adults (many dealing with addiction, trauma, homelessness, etc.)
<p><b>Adult Goal Progress Chart.</b> Identifies participants' personal learning goals and follows their progress in achieving these goals. Participants create an activity plan and document their progress in carrying out the activities, and developing and applying skills, during the process. <a href="http://ripal.literacy.bc.ca/fromthegroundup/2_2_FV_MTools.doc">http://ripal.literacy.bc.ca/fromthegroundup/2_2_FV_MTools.doc</a></p>	Parents and Children Together	Semi-urban Chilliwack, Abbotsford	Family Literacy
<p><b>Community Literacy Development.</b> This tool documents the number and type of partnerships community literacy groups develop in order to measure the amount of money and resources these partnerships leverage and the increased service delivery that results.</p> <p><a href="http://ripal.literacy.bc.ca/fromthegroundup/2_3_CBAL_MTools.doc">http://ripal.literacy.bc.ca/fromthegroundup/2_3_CBAL_MTools.doc</a></p>	Columbia Basin Alliance for Literacy	Rural Eastern BC	Adult and family literacy with emphasis on community development
<p><b>Reflective Practice.</b> This tool supports the practitioner in making change. The tool encourages the practitioner to step back from the busyness of daily life to assess, understand, and learn through their experiences.</p> <p><a href="http://ripal.literacy.bc.ca/fromthegroundup/2_4_NW_MTools.doc">http://ripal.literacy.bc.ca/fromthegroundup/2_4_NW_MTools.doc</a>            Optional labels: <a href="http://ripal.literacy.bc.ca/fromthegroundup/2_4_NW_Labels.pdf">http://ripal.literacy.bc.ca/fromthegroundup/2_4_NW_Labels.pdf</a></p>	Houston Link to Learning/ Storytellers' Foundation	Remote Rural Northwest BC	Isolated practitioners working in remote communities.
<p><b>Tutor Tools.</b> A set of three monitoring tools for use in volunteer tutor programs.</p> <p><a href="http://ripal.literacy.bc.ca/fromthegroundup/2_5_PLV_MTools.doc">http://ripal.literacy.bc.ca/fromthegroundup/2_5_PLV_MTools.doc</a></p>	Literacy Victoria	Urban Victoria	One-to-one volunteer tutoring

## More assessment resources

Borrow these and other resources from the Provincial Literacy Resource Centre by emailing [library@literacy.bc.ca](mailto:library@literacy.bc.ca)



### Assessing Literacy Reading Levels: Evaluating Aboriginal Literacy Material (2009)

It's very helpful to see the literacy level requirement, curriculum ideas and suitable resources in one easy-to-read page!

[https://www.elmoreviews.ca/product\\_view.php?id=443](https://www.elmoreviews.ca/product_view.php?id=443)

### Learner Centred Intake and Assessment Process for Literacy Programs in Saskatchewan (2008)

Some useful tools and checklists for assessing learners.

[https://www.elmoreviews.ca/product\\_view.php?id=410](https://www.elmoreviews.ca/product_view.php?id=410)

### Technological Literacy & The Matrix: An Instructor's Guide (2001)

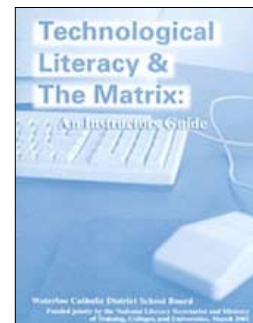
This text has some useful assessment tools, observational/progress charts and activities for computer skills practice.

[https://www.elmoreviews.ca/product\\_view.php?id=435](https://www.elmoreviews.ca/product_view.php?id=435)

### Tutor's Guide : Setting Literacy Goals and Recording Progress (2003)

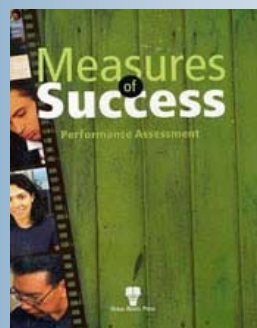
The book gives a comprehensive outline of literacy students' placement and evaluation.

[https://www.elmoreviews.ca/product\\_view.php?id=409](https://www.elmoreviews.ca/product_view.php?id=409)



### See the Monitoring and Assessment resource list for more:

[http://www.literacybc.ca/PLRC/monitor\\_assessrl.pdf](http://www.literacybc.ca/PLRC/monitor_assessrl.pdf)



### Measures of Success – Performance Assessment [DVD] Grass Roots Press Guest Review by *Sandy Middleton*

How do we reflect and document the development of literacy by different people in different contexts? That's the question at the heart of this DVD produced by Grass Roots Press.

It is designed to assist instructors and tutors to undertake performance assessments with their learners. Underlying performance assessment is the notion of literacy practices at home, at work and in the community. Performance assessments achieve several goals at once. Most importantly, they give learners the opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge, skills and learning in real life contexts. They also assist educators to determine learning needs and design appropriate and relevant instruction.

The DVD describes four different types of performance assessments: interviews, portfolios, building a rubric, and demonstrations. Each method is clearly demonstrated on the DVD through a scenario acted out by a tutor and learner. "Building a Rubric" is a particularly interesting tool. In this scenario, a learner and tutor create a rubric for a specific purpose determined by the learner. In a beautiful example of teamwork, together the tutor and learner decide on and document the criteria the learner will use to evaluate her own performance in a particular task.

This DVD and a second on Diagnostic Assessment are wonderful tools for tutors. The DVDs can be used for group training and/or given to tutors to take home and watch individually. Just under 30 minutes, each DVD provides an excellent introduction to the topic and opens up opportunities for reflection and discussion. For deeper reading, there is also a book called *Measures of Success*.

Borrow these resources from the Provincial Literacy Resource Centre or purchase from Grass Roots Press.

Read or write reviews at: [https://www.elmoreviews.ca/product\\_view.php?id=441](https://www.elmoreviews.ca/product_view.php?id=441)

## Using the benchmarks – Carol Forbes shares her experience

**Carol Forbes** is the Adult Literacy Coordinator for the Campbell River Community Literacy Association (CRCLA). Sixteen years ago, Carol began working in the school district literacy program. Within a year, she became one of the founders of the CRCLA where she has worked ever since. The CRCLA was formed as a way of reaching learners who were falling through the gaps. For four years, Carol served as a member of the Board for Literacy BC. In 2004, she was awarded the Canada Post Literacy Award for her work as an adult educator.

Carol has been working on a project to assemble learning materials for each of the Benchmarks in both Level 1 and Level 2. Here she shares her experience using them.

“To begin the assessment process, I meet all new students personally, discuss each person’s perception of where they need to begin, what personal goals they are working to achieve, when they will attend, whether working with a one-on-one tutor is something they would consider, and many other first time things people need to know.

Following this interview, the new student is usually introduced to a tutor. This is exactly where Benchmark 1 in its entirety is first introduced to a student and used for assessment, monitoring and as a focus for learning.

Now that we have assembled learning materials for each of the Benchmarks in both Level 1 and Level 2, our assessment, monitoring and ongoing learning all blend together.

One of the reasons the introduction of the Benchmarks is so exciting is because they are more than assessment tools.

The Benchmarks also work as guidelines and models for tutors to assist their students in progressing from level to level. In addition to the student materials related to each part of a Benchmark, supplementary material can be used when a student reaches difficult concepts.

### Thanks to ...

**Ningwakwe Learning Press** for donating books.

### Have an idea for a future ELMO Newsletter?

If you have any ideas for future newsletters – themes, resources, people to interview – we would love to hear them!

### Contact us

Please contact us for more information, for help using the website, to send us your reviews, borrow resources, or to give feedback. We particularly welcome feedback on the site in order to improve it.

The ELMO Reviews team   Deb Monkman, Project Manager   Doreen MacLean, Technical Coordinator   Emily Hunter, Project Coordinator



One of the other benefits of our record-keeping through the Benchmarks is that when a different tutor comes to work with a student, the tutor only has to check the Benchmark binder to see exactly where the student is working and where to go next.

We are collecting a body of material suitable for allowing students to demonstrate familiarity and a level of comprehension of any part of the Benchmark they are working on. So far, we have completed this work to the end of level 2 and revisions will be ongoing, probably forever. We are currently working on assembling material for Levels 3 and 4.

The Benchmarks are such an important step to link community, college, and school district literacy programs. We have never had such clear direction to shape student learning plans in the 15 years I have been involved in adult literacy. Nor have we had such a clear way to show student progress to the student, the tutor and other interested members of the literacy community - especially our funders.”

To learn more, contact [carol.forbes@sd72.bc.ca](mailto:carol.forbes@sd72.bc.ca).

### Add your voice

Visit [www.ELMOreviews.ca](http://www.ELMOreviews.ca) and add your voice! You can add a resource, comment on a review, or write a review.

- **Add** a resource to the database that you think others in the literacy field should know about – book, website, or audio-visual.
- **Comment** on someone else’s review – what was your experience with the resource?
- **Write** a mini-review – your opinion, short and simple, and star rating of a resource.

If you are someone who is working directly with learners, you may also be interested in writing a field review. Contact [library@literacy.bc.ca](mailto:library@literacy.bc.ca) to learn how.

Literacy BC, 601-510 West Hastings Street, Vancouver, BC V6B 1L8  
604-684-0624 ext. 105 or 1-888-READ-234 (toll free in BC)  
[library@literacy.bc.ca](mailto:library@literacy.bc.ca)