



Research Report

Assessment Challenges, Contradictions and
Inequities: An analysis of the use of digital
technology and OALCF Milestones

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2015

Acknowledgements

Thanks to all of the study participants from programs across Ontario who generously gave their time to the project. We would especially like to thank the coordinators, practitioners and assessors in six programs who accommodated our site visits and made us feel so welcome.

Thanks to our expert reviewers who provided their feedback on the survey and the final report:

Judith Amesbury, Program Coordinator for the Peterborough Native Learning Program; she has an MA in education & digital technology from the University of Ontario Institute of Technology

Tannis Atkinson, SSHRC Postdoctoral Fellow in the Department of Sociology and Legal Studies at the University of Waterloo

Becky Barber, adult literacy consultant, writer/researcher of ESKARGO and a previous review of OALCF implementation

Alan Cherwinski, Executive Director of AlphaPlus

Audrey Gardner, adult literacy researcher and PhD candidate at the University of Toronto.

Thanks also to the data analysts who work in the Evaluation Unit of MTCU for responding to our requests for detailed Milestone use data from EOIS-CaMS. Their very generous support of this project is greatly appreciated.

AlphaPlus is an organization that provides training, services, tools and resources to adult literacy agencies and educators in Ontario and Canada. AlphaPlus' mission is to increase adult literacy skills through the use of digital technologies by supporting educators and stakeholders with research, tools and training.

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This Employment Ontario project was supported by the Ontario Government with funding from the Service Delivery Network Development Fund (SDNDF) 2014-2015. The views expressed in the publication are the views of AlphaPlus and do not necessarily reflect those of the Ministry.

The report and the following briefs were developed as part of a project funded by the SDNDF.

Research Overview — Assessment Challenges, Contradictions and Inequities: An analysis of the use of digital technology and OALCF Milestones

Available for download at

<http://www.alphaplus.ca>

Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) Program Data

Lessons Learned From Analysing the OALCF Use Digital Technology Milestones

Practices Developed When Using the OALCF Milestones

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Contents

Acknowledgements 2

Contents **3**

Figures **5**

Tables **6**

Part 1: Introduction and Background **7**

Methods Overview 9

 Document analysis 9

 Collecting and Analysing Qualitative and Quantitative data 10

 A Comprehensive Curriculum Reform 11

 The Connection between OALCF Milestones and the Curriculum Framework 14

Previous Reviews 16

 Additional Workload 16

 Milestone Selection Challenges 16

 Selection Strategies 17

 Restricted Program Access 18

Summary 19

Part 2: Conceptual Foundation and Development **21**

The OALCF and Connections to Its Conceptual Model 21

 Skill Domains 23

 Levels and Complexity Indicators 24

 Model of Information-Processing 26

 Test Task Development 27

 Limited Uses for Test Results in Education 28

OALCF and Milestone Development 30

 A Novel Pedagogy: Literacy learning as task-based learning 30

 Statements of Difficulty and Complexity for Test Tasks not Skill Acquisition 32

 Milestones Aren't Designed to Measure Program Learning and Don't Provide Useful Results 33

 Milestone Administration Restrictions 34

Unique Features of Use Digital Technology Milestones 35

Summary 36

Part 3: LBS Program Overview **38**

LBS Programs: Learner Enrolment, Age, Goal Paths, Education 38

 Age of Learners 39

 Learner Goal Paths 40

 Education Attainment 42

Accommodating the OALCF 43

 Work Responsibilities and Time Pressures 43

 Assessments in Use 44

 Curriculum Frameworks in Use 46

Summary 49

Part 4: How Milestone Challenges Play Out in the Data **52**

Reliance on MS 54 and MS 55 to Ensure a Completed Milestone 52

Reliance on MS 57 to Open a Plan 53

Limited Use of the Milestones Overall 54

| | |
|--|------------|
| <i>Differences between Selection and Completion Rates</i> | 54 |
| <i>Further Examination of the Use Digital Technology Milestones</i> | 55 |
| <i>Summary</i> | 58 |
| Part 5: Milestone Selection Strategies | 59 |
| <i>Selection Strategy 1: Reliance on Use Digital Technology Milestones</i> | 59 |
| <i>Selection Strategy 2: Reliance on Milestone 57</i> | 63 |
| <i>Selection Strategy 3: Fitting Milestones into Current Curricular and Program Structures</i> | 64 |
| <i>Selection Strategy 4: Fitting Milestones into Courses</i> | 66 |
| <i>Selection Strategy 5: Developing Curriculum around a Milestone</i> | 68 |
| <i>Summary</i> | 70 |
| Part 6: Milestone Challenges and Contradictions | 72 |
| <i>Difficulty of the Milestones</i> | 72 |
| <i>Unfamiliar Content, Instructions and Terminology</i> | 74 |
| <i>Skills, Knowledge and Strategies are Unique and Not Transferable</i> | 75 |
| <i>Unpredictable Results and Efforts Made to Ensure Completion</i> | 76 |
| <i>Disconnection from Learner Goals and Program Purposes</i> | 79 |
| <i>Limited and Inconsistent Information about Progress</i> | 80 |
| <i>Lack of Meaning and Relevance for Learners</i> | 82 |
| <i>Complicating Student-Instructor and Program-Funder Relations</i> | 83 |
| <i>Summary</i> | 88 |
| Practices Developed to Make the Milestones Useable | 89 |
| Complicating Working Relations, Expertise and Learner Well-being | 90 |
| Part 7: Conclusion | 92 |
| <i>Mis-steps and next steps</i> | 93 |
| Appendix 1: The Performance Management Framework and Its Evolving Development | 96 |
| Appendix 2: Data Collection and Analysis Overview | 98 |
| Appendix 3: Chronology of Assessment and Curricular Changes for Accountability Purposes | 104 |
| Appendix 4: EOIS-CaMS Data Collection Questions | 106 |
| Appendix 5: Assessor Survey | 113 |
| Appendix 6: Study Overview and Invitation to Participate | 129 |
| Appendix 7: Interview Guide | 130 |
| Appendix 8: Confidentiality and Consent Form | 132 |

Figures

Figure 1: Sample Milestone Test Task 28

Figure 2: Total LBS Learners 2005-2014 35

Figure 3: Age of LBS Learners 2013-2014 37

Figure 4: Age of Learners from 2005 to 2014 38

Figure 5: LBS Learner Goal Paths 2013-2014 39

Figure 6: Learner Education Attainment 2013-2014 40

Figure 7: Intake Checklist..... 43

Figure 8: Colour-coded Stickers Applied to OALCF Chart..... 59

Figure 9: Data Entry Overview 60

Figure 10: Milestones Embedded in a Course..... 62

Figure 11: Referring to the Learning Activities Checklist for a Student’s Math Goal..... 63

Tables

Table 1: OALCF Assessment Overview..... 7

Table 2: Comparing LBS Learning Outcomes and the OALCF..... 11

Table 3: OALCF Framework Organization and Milestone Distribution 14

Table 4: Comparing Skill Domains and Sub-domains..... 22

Table 5: From Scoring Protocol to Performance Criteria 23

Table 6: Comparing Two Distinct Models of Reading..... 24

Table 7: International Literacy Survey Levels, Education Attainment and OALCF Levels 26

Table 8: Example of Complexity Indicators and Descriptors for Level 1 Read Continuous Text 29

Table 9: Assessments Used 42

Table 10: Curriculum Frameworks Used..... 44

Table 11: Top 10 Completed Milestones 48

Table 12: Most Commonly Selected Milestones 49

Table 13: Comparing Selected and Completed Milestones 50

Table 14: Comparing the Selection and Completion of Use Digital Technology Milestones by Education Level..... 51

Table 15: Comparing the Selection and Completion of Use Digital Technology Milestones by Sector 52

Table 16: Master Planning Chart..... 64

Table 17: Assessor Survey Topics and Question Types..... 89

Table 18: Respondent Profile by Sector..... 91

Table 19: Respondent Profile by Cultural Group (Stream)..... 91

Table 20: Interviewee Program Profile 92

Table 21: Numbers and Rates of OALCF Milestones In Progress and Completed for 2013-2014 96

Table 22: Numbers and Rates of French Milestones In Progress and Completed in 2013-2014..... 98

Table 23: Numbers and Rates of Use Digital Technology Milestones by Learner Groups 100

Part 1: Introduction and Background

In April 2012 Employment Ontario (EO)¹ introduced an extensive curriculum reform into the publicly-funded adult basic education program called Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS). Referred to as the Ontario Adult Literacy Curriculum Framework (OALCF),² the reform is described in hundreds of pages of documents that address various aspects of the LBS system, such as service coordination, five goal paths and transitions, learning materials, and program- or class-based assessments. It even proposes a novel pedagogical approach called task-based learning. At the core of the reform is a learning standards document—the OALCF Curriculum Framework. The standards, called competencies, are organized by three levels and six learning domains. Arguably, the aspect of the reform that is and will be most actively used is a complex assessment scheme comprised of three distinct assessments.

Table 1: OALCF Assessment Overview

| Assessment | Aim | Implementation |
|-----------------------------|---|--|
| 1. Milestones | Aims to provides data about ‘learner progress’ | Currently mandatory (60% of learners’ service plans MUST contain a completed Milestone) |
| 2. Culminating Tasks | Aims to provide data about whether learners complete their ‘goal path’ | In 2016-17, MTCU will introduce a target that LBS programs must meet |
| 3. Learner Gains | Aims to measure how much learners ‘gain’ by attending LBS programs Uses methods developed to score and create international adult literacy surveys conducted by the OECD | Test currently under development (once introduced in 2016-17, learners must take this test when they enter <i>and</i> exit LBS programs) |

The program funder, the Ministry of Training Colleges and Universities (MTCU), uses assessment results along with learner ‘suitability’ criteria to judge whether or not individual programs or service providers and their service delivery is ‘effective’. An individual program’s ‘effectiveness’ rating will be used to determine funding, which means that learner performance on three different assessments will have a direct impact on program funding. The ‘effectiveness’ category is one of three accountability categories. It is weighted most heavily in the ministry’s accountability model. For a comprehensive overview of the

¹ For an overview of Employment Ontario, refer to <http://www.tcu.gov.on.ca/eng/employmentontario/>

² For an overview of the Ontario Adult Literacy Curriculum Framework (OALCF) refer to <http://www.tcu.gov.on.ca/eng/employmentontario/>

evolving accountability model, which is called the Performance Management Framework (PMF) refer to Appendix 1.

This project focused on one of the assessments, the Milestones, the only aspect of the assessment scheme that is currently mandatory and fully developed. LBS programs must show that the majority of learners have completed at least one Milestone. The Milestones, available in both English and French, are a set of 60 test tasks. A set of guidelines in the *Milestones User Guide*³ describe how and when learners should take a Milestone test. Our study concludes that the Milestones and accompanying administration guidelines works counter to the ministry's objective for the OALCF to "improve service delivery, learner experiences and learner outcomes" by introducing a series of challenges, contradictions and inequities.

We became interested in the Milestones for a few reasons. First, three previous reviews⁴ focused on the OALCF Curriculum Framework and the Milestones (as part of both focused reviews and broader reviews of the OALCF initiative) indicate that instructors, assessors and program coordinators were experiencing the following challenges, confusions and contradictions, overshadowing any reported positive aspects.

- A more pervasive and directive curricular and assessment system that includes a novel and inflexible approach to assessment
- Confusions about the usefulness of the assessments in the context of supporting the development of an array of reading, writing and mathematical skills and knowledge
- Concerns about the disconnection of the Milestone assessments and the OALCF from program learning and pedagogical approaches
- Contradictions about the role and purpose of test results and the information they are designed to convey
- Concerns about the inability of the Milestones to describe and support literacy development for both beginning literacy learners and more advanced literacy learners preparing for post-secondary programs

³ Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (2012) *Milestones User Guide*. Available from MTCU.

⁴ The following three reviews of the OALCF and Milestones were examined:

- i) AlphaPlus (2013) *Review of Three OALCF Components*. Unpublished report available from MTCU.
- ii) Barber, R. (2014) *Provincial Perspective on the Success of OALCF Implementation, Reporting of Learner Progress, Data Integrity and the LBS Performance Management System*. Unpublished report available from Author.
- iii) Mazzulla, M., & Geraci, K. (2013) *Milestones Review Project: Research Report*. Unpublished report available from MTCU.

- Concerns about the inability of programs to show learner progress when reporting in the provincial database (EOIS-CaMS), and related concerns about registering learners who are not able to show progress in accordance to the Milestones.

Although two of the three reviews we examined were completed during the first year of the OALCF, our study demonstrates that these initial concerns persist.

Secondly, the researchers of this study were involved in the development of secondary aspects of the OALCF reform initiative. We witnessed how the main components of the OALCF (i.e. the curriculum framework and assessments) favoured the interests of accountability and management over sound pedagogical practice. In addition, we also participated in training events related to the OALCF and heard first-hand the concerns of LBS coordinators and practitioners. They are worried that the resulting data are not representative of individual progress and overall program 'effectiveness'; and as a result, do not fairly and objectively represent their programs and service delivery. They are also worried that the ministry will use the data to make funding decisions that could negatively impact their current funding allocations.

A final concern served as an entry point for our investigation. One strategy LBS programs quickly adopted to cope with Milestone challenges and comply with reporting targets was to select and have learners complete the OALCF Use Digital Technology Milestones far more often than other Milestones.⁵ We wanted to know whether the initial reliance on a limited number of Milestones was continuing, and determine *why* assessors were making this choice. An investigation focused on digital technology Milestones facilitated a broader investigation of Milestone use in general. We also wanted to know how assessors used the Milestones, why they make particular choices and the impacts of their use on teaching and learning and 'service quality'.

Methods Overview

To fully explore these questions, we combined a document analysis with an examination of both qualitative and quantitative data. Guided by our over-arching questions about the use of digital technology Milestones and Milestones in general, we developed a survey, an interview guide and document analysis questions in order to comprehensively investigate Milestone use.

Document analysis

We examined publicly available documents related to the development, use and administration of the OALCF and the Milestones. We also examined the most commonly used Milestones, including all three

⁵ A preliminary review of the Milestones indicated that the three digital technology Milestones were being selected over 20% of the time. See page 15 in Mazzulla, M., & Geraci, K. (2013) *Milestones Review Project: Research Report*. Available from MTCU.

digital technology Milestones. Included in our analysis are documents and studies related to the conceptual underpinnings of the OALCF. This part of the analysis builds on the researchers'⁶ previous empirical work. This work demonstrates that the transposition of methods developed for international population testing into an educational context present a series of limitations.

The document analysis was guided by the following questions in order to determine how and why the design of the Milestones contributes to the challenges experienced by assessors and learners:

- What are the conceptual underpinnings of the OALCF and the Milestones?
- How were the concepts and particular methods used in the design of the Milestones?
- What type of information about literacy learning is conveyed by the Milestones?
- What features of the digital technology Milestones make them more appealing to use?

Collecting and Analysing Qualitative and Quantitative data

In addition to the document analysis, we collected both qualitative and quantitative data from three sources: 1) Employment Ontario Information System – Case Management System (EOIS-CaMS), 2) a survey of 181 LBS assessors who administer the OALCF Milestones, and 3) in-depth interviews with 26 program coordinators, instructors and practitioners working in six different programs.

We examined EOIS-CaMS data to determine whether certain programs and learners experience more challenges than others and to determine which Milestones are being selected and completed most often.

The survey focused on program assessment practices in general, assessors' use of the Milestones and the information they provide. We explored similar topics during the interviews in a more in-depth and conversational manner. We compiled results from our survey, and analysed transcripts of our interviews with assessors, instructors, coordinators and administrative staff representing the EO regions and the LBS Sec-

⁶ Previous work completed includes the following:

i) Pinsent-Johnson, C. (2015) "From an International Adult Literacy Assessment to the Classroom: How Test Development Methods are Transposed into Pedagogy". In M. Hamilton, B. Maddox and C. Addey (Eds.), *Literacy as Numbers: Researching the Politics and Practices of Literacy Assessment Regimes*. London, UK: Cambridge University Press.

ii) Pinsent-Johnson, C. (2014) "The Coordination of Adult Literacy Policy and Pedagogy to Ensure Productivity in a Knowledge Economy". In D. Plumb (Ed.) *Proceedings of the 33rd Conference of the Canadian Association for the Study of Adult Education (CASAE)* (pp. 189-194). Available at <http://journals.msvu.ca/ocs/index.php/casae2014/CASAE14/paper/viewFile/64/42>

iii) Sturm, M. (2013) *Voices Speak to the Data: Feedback from Participants in the PIAAC On-line Field Trial*. Available at <http://www.alphaplus.ca/>

tors and Streams. Interview data and assessors' comments from the survey were used to help us understand the particular strategies used to select Milestones in general and digital technology Milestones in particular.

Each data set was initially analysed separately, and then data were analysed together to develop common themes to support an interpretation. This approach allows us to compare, contrast and corroborate (i.e. triangulate) findings from the different data sets. The qualitative and quantitative data were given equal consideration and value when developing an overall interpretation⁷. A detailed description of data collection, including the development of data collection tools, and subsequent analysis can be found in Appendix 2.

Findings from the survey and interviews are not generalizable to all practitioners/instructors and coordinators who administer the Milestones, nor are they statistically representative of all programs and program practices. However, our findings do convey a compelling and rigorous portrayal of practices, concerns and pedagogical issues with the Milestones, particularly since much of the data are from those who have the most experience using the Milestones and witness their impacts on learners. Although we did not include learners in the study, practitioners provided tremendous insight into the learning experiences and responses of learners to the Milestones. Findings from EOIS-CaMS data would represent wide-spread practices, as these data are generated from provincial reports submitted by all programs.

We view the Milestones, similar to any assessment or text, as a situated literacy practice. This means they are situated in a very specific context and have been created to fulfill certain purposes. Milestone texts convey meaning and information in a particular way. What learners do to ascertain and demonstrate their understanding in the testing situation is not necessarily what they do outside the testing situation, even when responding to similar texts. The literacy skills, knowledge, strategies and insights used when completing the various Milestone test tasks are also situated, and do not automatically transfer from the testing situation to everyday use.

A Comprehensive Curriculum Reform

The Ontario Adult Literacy Curriculum Framework (OALCF) was implemented in 2011-2012 after a two year development period. It was a sweeping and comprehensive curricular reform initiative that involved numerous LBS support organizations in its development and subsequent implementation training. During this period, the provincial government provided an additional \$5 million dollars that was used to support the implementation of the OALCF, EOIS-CaMS, and research and development. Smaller organizations received increases to their annual funding allocations in order to help them accommodate the additional administrative and reporting requirements that accompanied the new curriculum framework and

⁷ Creswell, J. and Plano-Clark, V. (2007) *Designing and Conducting Mixed-Methods Research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

reporting system. Although the development project directly involved the participation of LBS support organizations, the core components of the project, the OALCF and the Milestones were primarily developed by a small team of consultants with limited input from the full curriculum development team, support organizations and the field. It is beyond the scope of this study to fully investigate the reasons why the initial collaborative intentions of the project were not fully realized. Similar to many curriculum reform projects in education, competing interests and time pressures restricted the project’s collaborative organizational aims. More importantly, those who actually teach adult learners had no direct involvement in the development of the core components of the OALCF, including the content of the Milestones and their alignment with curricular practices, student interests, and common pedagogical practices and testing administration.

This curriculum reform also introduced several unique curricular, assessment and pedagogical aspects to the adult literacy accountability process, which had been in place since 1998. At that time, the concept of learning outcomes was articulated in a skills development matrix in the document *Working with Learning Outcomes (Validation Draft)*. Refer to Appendix 2 for a complete chronology of accountability reforms and initiatives in the Ontario system. Although modifications were made after 1998, including a widely used simplification of the original skills matrix called *The Level Descriptions*, fundamental elements, such as the underpinning reading comprehension model, level hierarchy and type of performance criteria, remained intact. The table below compares the main elements of the previous learning outcomes approach with the OALCF in order to highlight some key differences.

Table 2: Comparing LBS Learning Outcomes and the OALCF

| | Learning Outcomes | OALCF |
|---------------------------------------|---|--|
| Level hierarchy | Five levels equated to grade levels in the Ontario K-12 system | Three levels equated to the OECD’s international adult literacy surveys |
| Skill domains | Three main skill domains and 10 sub-domains | Six main domains or competencies and 11 sub-domains or task groups |
| Underpinning model of literacy | Derived from a reading comprehension approach used in K-12 and most adult learning systems | Derived from an information-processing model created for the international surveys Ontario is the first and only jurisdiction to develop and fully implement its curriculum framework using a model of literacy developed for international surveys |
| Performance criteria | Focused on describing the individual acquisition of discrete skill elements associated with reading comprehension | Focused on describing how discrete skill elements associated with the information-processing model are assembled to make a particular test task more difficult |

| | | |
|--|---|---|
| <p>Associated assessments</p> | <p>Instructors developed assessments called Demonstrations to show the acquisition of skills</p> <p>Instructors developed and shared collections of Demonstrations</p> <p>A common assessment system was developed using a provincially recognized collection <i>Common Assessment of Basic Skills</i> (CABS)</p> | <p>Instructors are no longer directly involved in the development of assessments</p> <p>Three distinct assessments are or will be in use:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A set of 60 Milestones with administration and scoring protocols 2. A set of Culminating Tasks 3. The development of a standardized tool that will provide a score using the OECD's literacy survey methodology |
| <p>Reliability and validity processes</p> | <p>No processes for standardization (i.e. standardized delivery and interpretation and validity and reliability) were established</p> | <p>To date, no processes for reliability and validity of the assessment scheme as a whole have been established</p> <p>A standardized administration protocol for the Milestones has been developed; in addition, some reliability work has been completed through field trials</p> <p>Neither the Milestones nor the Culminating Tasks have been validated in relation to their underpinning model of literacy and in relation to curricular and pedagogical practices in programs</p> |
| <p>Use of assessment results</p> | <p>Results from completed Demonstrations were included in learner portfolios and examined during program monitoring visits</p> <p>Level achievements were reported in the provincial database (i.e. Information Management System)</p> <p>Test results were <i>not</i> tied to funding</p> | <p>Assessment results from the Milestones and Culminating Tasks are reported in the provincial database (EOIS-CaMS)</p> <p>Targets have been established for the completion of Milestones</p> <p>Results will be used as part of a series of performance management criteria to make funding decisions</p> |

The move to directly tie funding decisions to assessment results is a substantial change, and moves the Milestones into the high-stakes arena, as important decisions about program funding and compliance are based on their successful completion. To date, no other educational and learning system in the province uses test results to make funding decisions. In addition, no other jurisdiction in the world has built a curricular accountability system using some of the methods developed for international adult literacy surveys. (Exactly how international literacy survey methods are incorporated will be fully explored in Part 2: Conceptual Foundation and Development.) The OALCF assessment scheme also disengages instructors and their expertise from the curricular accountability process. The impacts of such major changes are comprehensively investigated in this study.

The Connection between OALCF Milestones and the Curriculum Framework

Each Milestone test task is constructed to relate to the OALCF Curriculum Framework⁸. This means that the development of the Milestones was regulated by the OALCF Curriculum Framework. We can see this happening in three different ways:

1. The Milestones use the same organizational features (i.e. skill domains and leveling system) as the Curriculum Framework
2. The Milestones and the Curriculum Framework conceptualize and operationalize a model of learning called task-based learning
3. The general content and topics of the Milestones are described as *example tasks* in the Curriculum Framework
4. The specific literacy skill elements that determine difficulty or complexity for the Milestones are described in detail in the Curriculum Framework.

Not only was the development of the Milestones governed by the OALCF Curriculum Framework but the Milestones are the only element in the OALCF that brings the Curriculum Framework to life. In other words, the framework and the Milestone assessment system were developed and designed to work together. The OALCF framework was not designed to reflect or describe the *current* organization of program learning or the overall pedagogical approaches used in programs. Instead, the framework describes a novel approach to program learning that is then actualized using the Milestones.

Organizational Features

The 60 Milestones are organized by skill domains and sub-domains referred to in the OALCF as *competencies and task groups*. They are also organized across three hierarchical levels of difficulty or, using the terms of the OALCF, *task complexity levels*.

Table 3: OALCF Framework Organization and Milestone Distribution

| Competency | Task Group | Number of Level 1 Milestones | Number of Level 2 Milestones | Number of Level 3 Milestones |
|----------------------------|--|------------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------|
| A Find and Use Information | A1 Read continuous text | 2 | 2 | 3 |
| | A2 Interpret documents | 2 | 2 | 2 |
| | A3 Extract info from films, broadcasts & presentations | 1 | | |

⁸ See page 3 in Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (2012) *Milestones User Guide*. Available from MTCU.

| | | | | |
|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------|---|---|---|
| B Communicate Ideas and Information | B1 Interact with others | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| | B2 Write continuous text | 3 | 3 | 3 |
| | B3 Complete & create documents | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| | B4 Express oneself creatively | 1 | | |
| C Understand and Use Numbers | C1 Manage money | 1 | 2 | 1 |
| | C2 Manage time | 1 | 2 | 1 |
| | C3 Use measures | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| | C4 Manage data | 2 | 2 | 2 |
| D Use Digital Technology | n/a | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| E Manage Learning | n/a | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| F Engage with Others | n/a | 1 | | |

This project examines the use of the three digital technology Milestones which opens up an exploration of the Milestone system. The three digital technology Milestones are

1. Milestone 54 – Log into a user account on a computer (Level 1)
2. Milestone 55 – Conduct an internet search (Level 2)
3. Milestone 56 – Select a computer program and use a wide range of software features to present information (Level 3)

Their development and features that make them unique and appealing to use compared to other Milestones will be described in Part 2.

Previous Reviews

To date, three separate reviews have examined the OALCF and the Milestones. All reviews have remained unpublished, and have not been released to the field. They are⁹

1. *Review of Three OALCF Components*
2. *Milestones Review Project: Research Report*
3. *Provincial Perspective on the Success of OALCF Implementation, Reporting of Learner Progress, Data Integrity and the LBS Performance Management System*

The most comprehensive field-based data can be found in the *Provincial Perspective* report that contains the findings from 85 focus groups involving 524 instructors and coordinators representing programs throughout the province.

Together, the reports raise many issues and concerns that indicate the field is experiencing multiple challenges with the Milestones. Their findings also indicate there are serious concerns regarding the ability of the Milestones to produce reliable data that demonstrates progress for accountability purposes.

Additional Workload

Comments made by respondents in a survey conducted only six months after the introduction of the Milestones indicate that instructors and coordinators must devote time and resources to learn to use and understand a distinctly different curriculum framework and assessment system. They are spending time modifying and adapting existing materials in order to make alignments between the OALCF and current organizational approaches. Over half (56%) of respondents said that the time they spend on assessments has increased overall, and two-thirds said they use at least two of assessments in addition to the OALCF Milestones¹⁰. It will be of interest to see if these concerns have remained the same or changed as we collect data in this current study.

Milestone Selection Challenges

Based on survey findings in the *Milestones Review* report, the majority (60%) of respondents from community-based programs, which have learners with lower education levels, stated that they were unable to

⁹ The three reviews and evaluations are the following:

- i. AlphaPlus (2013) *Review of Three OALCF Components*. Unpublished report available from MTCU.
- ii. Barber, R. (2014) *Provincial Perspective on the Success of OALCF Implementation, Reporting of Learner Progress, Data Integrity and the LBS Performance Management System*. Unpublished report available from Author.
- iii. Mazzulla, M., & Geraci, K. (2013) *Milestones Review Project: Research Report*. Unpublished report available from MTCU.

¹⁰ Mazzulla, M., & Geraci, K. (2013) *Milestones Review Project: Research report*

select a suitable OALCF Milestone. However, only 20% of respondents from the college sector, which have learners with the highest levels of education, stated they were unable to select a suitable Milestone. (And 38% of respondents in school-board programs were unable to make a suitable selection for their learners.) The suitability challenge is also unevenly experienced by different cultural streams. While the majority (63%) of respondents working with Anglophone and Francophone learners¹¹ were able to make a suitable selection, only 31% of respondents working with Deaf learners were able to make a suitable selection; and 42% of those working with Native learners were able to make a suitable selection.

Assessors were experiencing the following selection challenges:

- No Milestones are related to the learner's goals and individual interests
- Milestones are too difficult
- Milestones are not responsive to cultural literacy practices in the Deaf community
- Milestones are not aligned with the pedagogical approaches used in programs and the skills, knowledge, strategies and insights that are used to inform their curricula, particularly for learners in the academic goal paths (i.e. apprenticeship, postsecondary and secondary).

In addition, according to the findings in the *Provincial Perspective* review, instructors have different interpretations about when to administer a Milestone and what it is supposed to represent. The author concludes that there is no common understanding of what a Milestone represents. Does it indicate the completion of a competency and task-group and ability to move on to the next level? Or does it simply indicate an ability to complete the Milestone in the testing situation but not beyond that? Does it represent skill use at the end of an OALCF level or the beginning?

Selection Strategies

One way assessors responded to the challenges was to use the digital technology Milestones. According to the *Milestones Review* all three digital technology Milestones were among the top ten most commonly selected Milestones. The digital technology Milestones, representing only 5% of all Milestones, were selected 21% of the time. These Milestones were also being completed at similar rates indicating that instructors were able to predict the ability of their learners to complete the digital technology Milestones. Assessors' initial reliance on these Milestones over others continues.

¹¹ There appears to be a discrepancy between the 86% of Francophone learner plans that did not indicate a selected Milestone and the majority of respondents who stated that they were able to select suitable Milestones for Francophone learners.

Restricted Program Access

The *Provincial Perspective* report articulates the impacts that selection challenges and the subsequent strategies are having on learners, educators and programs. In addition, the researcher concludes that the overall result is the absence of reliable data that can be used to demonstrate progress.

Instructors are concerned that they won't be able to show learner progress in the EOIS-CaMS system, which could then jeopardize their funding. These concerns are most acute for learners with limited literacy experiences, for those with lower education levels and for those acquiring literacy skills in an additional language and culture. In response, instructors and assessors said they were either keeping learners off the books and continuing to work with them or they were not registering learners who could not complete a Milestone when entering the program.

The report emphasizes that the issue is not with programs and educator expertise, but the problem is the inability of the system to account for program practices and the diversity of learners. Those from community-based programs who often rely on volunteers report that they have become the “dumping grounds for the undesirables.” Learners who are now “hardest to serve” within the accountability system are referred to programs with the least funding and fewest resources.¹² This has created tension within communities when programs meet together, according to one commentator.

We are being forced to narrow suitability criteria in order to meet targets, which is the process of “creaming” by restricting entry only those learners who will quickly progress and reach their goals. We fear we are simply creating another system defined by exclusivity that creates “new gaps” for learners to fall through. This will increase marginalization of already marginalized populations.¹³

The report's author writes that some programming options that were available before the OALCF have ceased or have changed in such a way as to ensure reporting targets are met. Available program options for some adult learners are either less accessible or have disappeared altogether. A participant stated the following:

We have altered programs because the lower level learners would not allow for reporting. There's nothing left for them. Nowhere for them to go to receive the services they need to rise above their current circumstance.¹⁴

¹² Page 25, Provincial Perspective

¹³ Page 31

¹⁴ Page 29

The author also notes that those instructors and coordinators who do attempt to report accurately and adhere to reporting protocols and guidelines, including Milestone administration protocols, are worried that their efforts may be “outmatched” by another program that “manipulates program stats” to meet targets “on paper.”¹⁵

What is called a “counter-productive focus” on data and reporting over learner needs and program development means that both learners and educators are under pressure.

*We feel pressured to produce results that are not reflective of the learning. This creates anxiety for both learners and practitioners.*¹⁶

The accountability and related reporting requirements also require learners, many of whom have had negative experiences within the education system, to complete an assessment that is disconnected from their goals and abilities. This, states the author, “gives learners a false sense of their skill attainment and perpetuates unrealistic expectations.”¹⁷

Furthermore, states the author, Milestones are perceived as a mandated reporting requirement that must be completed in order to maintain program funding.

*Milestones are not used to report progress within one level of task complexity, nor are they used to report progress from one level of task complexity to the next. Milestones are only administered because we are mandated to do so in order to demonstrate compliance and ensure continued funding. They are in no way seen to be effective tools for demonstrating learner progress and, in themselves, are useless.*¹⁸

While a full exploration of issues related to restricted program access is beyond the scope of the current study, it is crucial to examine the extent to which programs may be keeping students off the books, refusing to register students and referring students to other programs as a result of the OALCF.

Summary

The reports raise many issues and concerns that indicate the field is experiencing multiple challenges with the Milestones. Their findings also indicate there are serious concerns regarding the ability of the Milestones to produce reliable data that demonstrates progress for accountability purposes. This study investigated these issues further using a more comprehensive approach that includes the following:

¹⁵ Page 11

¹⁶ Page 12

¹⁷ Page 22

¹⁸ Page 19

- An analysis of the theoretical underpinnings of the OALCF and Milestones,
- Additional analysis of EOIS-CaMS data two years after the introduction of the OALCF
- Comparative analysis of LBS programs and Milestone use data, and
- More in-depth analysis of Milestone selection strategies and challenges.

Part 2: Conceptual Foundation and Development

The Milestones were designed to provide MTCU with objective and reliable data that could be used to evaluate program ‘effectiveness’ and to make a direct connection between LBS program outcomes and the results of large-scale international adult literacy surveys such as IALS, IALSS and PIAAC¹⁹. Ontario is the first and only known jurisdiction in the world to have reformulated and mandated the use of some of the international survey test development methods for educational and pedagogical purposes. Our analysis indicates that there are important reasons this approach has not been adopted elsewhere. Making a direct connection between literacy program performance outcomes and results from international adult literacy surveys is an unachievable goal even if seemingly similar methodological components are used. Transposing methodological elements from the international adult literacy surveys into an educational context means the OALCF and Milestones are not built on a strong foundation of literacy learning but are built using a series of assumptions, limitations and modifications, which directly impact the usefulness of the OALCF, the Milestone testing results that are used to judge individual programs and their service delivery effectiveness. There is also a direct impact on teaching and learning, as programs devise various ways to cope with an assessment system that was not primarily designed to support learners and learning.

The OALCF and Connections to Its Conceptual Model

It is challenging to recognize how test development methods from international literacy surveys are incorporated into the OALCF Curriculum Framework and Milestones since numerous adaptations were made. In addition, the OALCF incorporates aspects of the Essential Skills framework, which in turn, incorporates some adapted methods and principles developed for the international surveys. However, some elements from both the Essential Skills framework and the international survey tests and their developmental framework can be identified and include the following:

1. OALCF skill domains that are aligned to the Essential Skills domains
2. The OALCF leveling hierarchy and complexity indicators that are aligned to the international literacy surveys
3. Partial use of what is called an information-processing model of reading developed exclusively for international testing purposes; and

¹⁹ The three adult literacy surveys conducted by the OECD are the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS), the International Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey (IALSS) and the Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Literacy Competencies (PIAAC).

4. Basic principles of test task content development used in the international literacy surveys and related spin-off tests such as the Test of Workplace Essential Skills (TOWES).

Not carried into the OALCF Curriculum Framework and the Milestones are the more complex test task development processes that are used to establish test task difficulty. This fundamental difference has serious implications for the ability of the Milestones and the OALCF Curriculum Framework leveling system to have an alignment with the same leveling system used in international surveys and the Essential Skills. This means that the OALCF does not have a rigorous connection to the Essential Skills and international literacy surveys. The OALCF merely has a surface-level connection to its underpinning conceptual model, a connection primarily based on semantics and not operational procedures. The OALCF also introduced new methods which distance it further from its theoretical underpinnings. Subsequently, the OALCF operates in its own unique way without a strong methodological connection to either the Essential Skills or the OECD's international adult literacy surveys. This also means that the Milestones are distinct from standardized tests that incorporate complex test task development processes that are used to establish test task difficulty. These spin-off tests include PIAAC Online, Prose, Document Quantitative (PDQ), Essential Skills for Employment and Education (ESEE) and the Test of Workplace Essential Skills (TOWES). This means that the OALCF Milestones would likely operate differently, providing different results, compared to standardized spin-off tests. This would make alignments within the LBS assessments scheme, that is between the Milestones and a potential learner gains tool, challenging and potentially impossible to make

Not having a rigorous methodological connection to the Essential Skills and international literacy surveys makes pedagogical sense. Neither of these projects was designed to support the development and teaching of literacy. The international literacy surveys measure skill distribution in populations. They do not measure individual skill acquisition. The Essential Skills framework was initially designed to compare international survey results with occupational demands in order to determine if there is a connection between the survey results and skills used in the workplace²⁰. Although the Essential Skills is used in many literacy education contexts, we don't know exactly how it's used, what parts are used, what is and isn't useful, and how it compares to other teaching and learning approaches. However, since the mandate for the development of the OALCF—originally articulated in the Request for Proposal (RFP) for the curriculum project and subsequently reiterated in presentations describing the project—was to create a connection to

²⁰ See Jones, S. (2005) "Essential Skills in Practice: Methodology and Measurement in Surveys." In T. Wallace, N. Murphy, G. Lépine & D. Brown (Eds.), *Exploring New Directions in Essential Skills* (pp. 45-52). Ottawa, ON: Public Policy Forum.

the Essential Skills and international literacy surveys²¹, we must consider if this mandate has been realized or is even possible. The following section examines how components from the Essential Skills and international literacy surveys are incorporated into the OALCF Curriculum Framework and Milestones.

Skill Domains

The Essential Skills framework was used as a main reference to develop the skill domains (i.e. competencies and task groups) used in the OALCF. Although some modifications were made (e.g., integrating listening skills with reading, integrating speaking with writing, including a creative element and excluding the Essential Skills category Thinking Skills) the alignment is generally kept intact. In comparison, the skill domain alignment between the Essential Skills and OECD’s literacy survey project is substantially expanded. However, a fundamental connection using reading skills remains intact and is carried into the Essential Skills and the OALCF. It is the reading domain that anchors the Essential Skills and OALCF to the international literacy framework.

Although support documents make the claim that “the curriculum framework departs from the ES framework... and adopts instead a system whereby learning is organized and articulated to competencies and task groups that allow for integrated skills development”²² several alignments are maintained. The table below illustrates the alignments. Dark arrows indicate a direct alignment between the Essential Skills domains and sub-domains, and between the OALCF competencies and task groups. Outlined arrows indicate where new task groups or aspects of a task group were created for the OALCF. And the highlighted text indicates how the reading domains remain intact throughout.

Table 4: Comparing Skill Domains and Sub-domains

| OECD Skill Domains (IALS and ALL) | Essential Skills Domains and Sub-domains | OALCF Competencies and Task Groups |
|-----------------------------------|---|--|
| Prose (continuous text) | →Reading text | Find and use information |
| Document (non-continuous text) | →Document use | →Read continuous text →Interpret documents ⇨Extract information from films, broadcasts and presentations |
| Quantitative | Numeracy Money math Scheduling or Budgeting and Accounting Math Measurement and Calculation Math Data Analysis Math | Understand and use numbers →Manage money →Manage time →Use measures →Manage data |

²¹ Documents available from report authors.

²² Page 4 in *OALCF: Curriculum Framework Conceptual Foundation* (2011)

| | | |
|-----|---------------------|---|
| n/a | Writing | Communicate ideas and information → Write continuous text |
| n/a | Oral communication | → Interact with others → Complete and ⇨ create documents ⇨ Express oneself creatively |
| n/a | Computer use | → Use digital technology |
| n/a | Continuous learning | → Manage learning |
| n/a | Working with others | → Engage with others |
| n/a | Thinking skills | n/a |

Levels and Complexity Indicators

The three levels in the OALCF were designed to relate to the Essential Skills leveling hierarchy, and, in turn, the international survey framework. The OALCF levels are

...informed by the same factors that drive complexity at Essential Skills (ES) Levels 1, 2, and 3. The interplay of context familiarity, text complexity, and task requirements contributes to how challenging a task is. It is this interplay which is documented in the curriculum framework²³.

However, attempting to make a rigorous and meaningful connection is impossible without also incorporating the more complex test task development processes that are used to establish test task difficulty. In addition, developers incorporated statements of difficulty and complexity from curriculum frameworks designed to support literacy and language learning. As a result, the OALCF framework does not “draw exclusively on the ES for its conceptualization of levels.”²⁴ It does however incorporate general descriptions of each level. This is where a merely semantic connection and not a methodological connection is made.

To help describe how the very complex international literacy testing system works international literacy survey test developers created a set of statements called *level descriptions*. These are statements that are

²³ Page 4 in OALCF: Curriculum Framework Conceptual Foundation (2011)

²⁴ Ibid.

used to describe the variables²⁵ that make test tasks difficult at each level for each skill domain (i.e. prose, document, quantitative). It was these level descriptions that were then used as a basis to develop the Essential Skills complexity indicators. The level descriptions are derived from detailed scoring protocols used to generate raw scores for test tasks. In the table below, a comparison of only a small part of the scoring protocol used to score reading test tasks is shown next to the levels descriptions, which is then shown next to the Essential Skills descriptors used to describe task complexity and the OALCF descriptors. What this table illustrates is the gradual reduction and parsing of the level descriptions from the international survey to the OALCF. It also demonstrates that developers were attempting to make only a semantic connection to the Essentials Skills and international surveys and not a rigorous methodological connection.

Table 5: From Scoring Protocol to Performance Criteria

| Scoring Protocol | International Literacy Survey Level Descriptions | Essential Skills Complexity Rating | OALCF Read Continuous Texts |
|--|---|---|---|
| If locate, add 1 If within paragraph, add 0 If 1 phrase to search on, add 0 If 1 item response, add 0 If match is literal or synonymous, add 0 If completion of new information frame requires no inference or the identification of a paradigmatic relationship, add 0 | Most of the tasks in this level require the reader to read relatively short text to locate a single piece of information which is identical to or synonymous with the information given in the question or directive. If plausible but incorrect information is present in the text, it tends not to be located near the correct information. | Read relatively short texts to locate a single piece of information Follow simple written directions | Read brief texts to locate specific details |

Since the level descriptors were designed to describe a series of test tasks, they only have meaning and usefulness when examining those test tasks. On their own, statements such as “Read relatively short texts to locate a single piece of information” and “Read brief texts to locate specific details” have little meaning, and do not provide pedagogically useful information about literacy development. The OALCF complexity descriptors only have meaning when examining the Milestones.

²⁵ The five variables used to establish test task difficulty are 1) the type of processing involved; 2) the type of information being requested; 3) the type of match or connection between the question and correct answer; 4) the length and complexity of the text itself; and 5) the plausibility of distractors within the text (Kirsch, 2001).

Model of Information-Processing

The international literacy survey test tasks use a model of reading that was developed specifically for similar large-scale testing projects. It was named an *information-processing* model. It was not derived from theories related to learning to read, but was derived from an analysis of errors made on previous literacy tests²⁶.

In the model, the test-taker is guided through the following processes using the test questions and the test content in order to successfully complete a test task:

1. Identify a goal for reading the text (i.e. complete the test task)
2. Then identify ‘given’ and ‘requested’ information (i.e. the test question)
3. Search the ‘target document’ to ‘match given information’
4. Then ‘extract’ details from the text to ‘complete the requested information frame’ (i.e. answer the question)
5. Verify the information.

At any stage, the test-taker or reader may have to ‘cycle’ back to a previous stage in order to complete the task²⁷. In addition, in the testing process, distracting information is intentionally inserted. This is the primary element that is used to establish test task difficulty. It is not used in the OALCF. The extent to which, or even if, an individual would actually adhere to such highly regulated processes outside the testing situation is not known and has never been empirically investigated.

Furthermore, the information-processing model was developed to be distinct from school-based literacy testing and commonly used standardized reading tests, all of which rely on a reading comprehension model. The table below compares the key aspects of both models.

²⁶ Kirsch, I. and Guthrie, J. (1980) “Construct Validity of Functional Reading Tests.” *Journal of Educational Measurement* 17 (2), 81–93.

²⁷ Guthrie, J. and Mosenthal, P. (1987) “Literacy as Multidimensional: Locating information and reading comprehension.” *Educational Psychologist* 22 (3-4), 279–97; Kirsch, I. (2001) *The International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS): Understanding what was measured*. Available at <https://www.ets.org/Media/Research/pdf/RR-01-25-Kirsch.pdf>

Table 6: Comparing Two Distinct Models of Reading

| Information-Processing Model | Reading Comprehension Model |
|--|--|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Identify a goal 2. Identify 'given' and 'requested' information 3. Search the 'target document' to 'match given information' 4. Extract details from the text to 'complete the requested information frame' 5. Verify the information and cycle back as needed. | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Read a text in its entirety 2. Retell and recount what was read 3. Identify the main idea 4. Find supporting details 5. Summarize |

The skills, knowledge strategies and insights used in an information-processing model are different from those used in a reading comprehension model. It is likely that a solid foundation in reading comprehension supports the development of the more particular and minimalistic information-processing approach, similar to applying skimming and scanning techniques, an advanced reading skill. No empirical work has been done to demonstrate how and even if the information-processing approach has any usefulness outside a testing situation. In other words, we don't know how often and how useful such an approach could be when people are reading in various contexts. The predominant approach to teaching reading is based on the reading comprehension model. Although the Milestones, similar to the way that the Curriculum Framework made adaptations and changes to the levels and skill domains, do not draw exclusively in the information-processing approach, enough of the approach is used to create a very distinct testing approach. In other words, the OALCF Milestones don't align with either an information-processing approach, nor do they align with a reading comprehension approach. Most importantly, the OALCF Milestones were not designed to reflect the way that literacy skills, knowledge, strategies and insights are predominantly taught in formal education and used in day to day literacy activities.

Test Task Development

The Milestones incorporate some of the test content development principles devised for the international adult literacy surveys. Most striking, is the incorporation of decontextualized and generalized content to facilitate international testing in multiple languages. There is no reason except adherence to the regulating principles of the OECD test tasks that references familiar to LBS learners in the province can't be made. The Milestones are stripped of specific contextual cues such as logos and recognizable names and places. Expected information may be missing and textual formats may be simplified. For example, one of the Milestone test tasks uses information from an Ontario high school course description. However, the information is a made-up approximation. Rather than using actual course codes, course descriptions, the names of courses and names of subjects used in Ontario secondary curriculum documents, all this information is created anew. It's perplexing since examining a secondary school course guide is an activity that a learner

may actually need to do. It's also perverse. In order to read the information and respond to the test questions, a learner cannot rely on previously acquired knowledge about course selection in the secondary system. Learners may have this knowledge to pursue their own goals or to support their children's education. A test-taker is blocked from using real-world knowledge and experience when completing a Milestone. A person's ability to complete test tasks in the international literacy survey and the Milestones in the OALCF does not reflect what they would normally do outside the testing situation. The Milestones are not an authentic representation of literacy uses and demands.

Limited Uses for Test Results in Education

It is beyond the scope of this project to fully examine the results of international literacy surveys and their socio-economic implications. We are focused only on the use of aspects of the survey within the context of education. We have examined how test development methods from international literacy surveys are incorporated into the OALCF and Milestones and conclude that the attempt to make a rigorous connection is not pedagogically possible and was ultimately not achieved. In addition, another aspect of the survey, the actual test results, have little to no relevance in the context of the LBS program. Currently, LBS guidelines state that learners are eligible to enter the program if their "literacy and basic skills are assessed at intake as being less than the end of Level 3 of the International Adult Literacy and Skills Survey (IALSS) or the OALCF"²⁸. Not only is this ultimately confusing, since the OALCF does not have a rigorous alignment with the international literacy survey results, the use of the international survey results on their own are misleading and irrelevant.

The only current way to make some sort of connection between international literacy survey results and learning is to examine the education attainment of test-takers and their scores, highlighted in the table below. Canadian adults scoring at the mid-point in Level 3 have completed their postsecondary education including university. Those scoring at the initial stages of Level 3 have some postsecondary education. In general, the skills needed to complete test tasks at Level 2 are acquired in secondary school, and the skills needed to complete tasks at Level 3 are acquired in colleges and universities. By default, adults with some high school education or less score at Level 1 or below.

²⁸ Page 21 in the LBS Program Guidelines

Table 7: International Literacy Survey Levels and Education Attainment

| Levels and scores | Percentage of the population (16-65) | Education Attainment Average Literacy Scores 16-65 Canada |
|-------------------|--------------------------------------|--|
| Below 1 (0-175) | 6% | |
| Level 1 (0-225) | 17% | |
| Level 2 (226-275) | 32% | Less than high school diploma = 234 High school diploma= 267 |
| Level 3 (276-325) | 33% | PSE below bachelor’s degree = 276 PSE bachelor’s degree or higher = 300 |
| Level 4 (326-375) | 11% | |
| Level 5 (376-500) | 1% | |

The strongest indicator of a person’s ability to complete the international literacy survey test tasks is their level of formal education, as education level has a “strong positive relationship” to the scores²⁹. A test-taker arguably needs 8-10 years of education to score within Level 1. The average reading level of all test tasks is Grade 8. In addition, test-takers need to be familiar with test-taking conventions and strategies and they need to be able to interpret text without the support of recognizable cultural, social and community references, which could require additional formal education experience. Attempting to use the international literacy surveys to guide the development of literacy or even to say something meaningful about their literacy for adults who have less than 8-10 years of education is simply not possible.

Many adults in LBS who have 8-10 years of formal education would likely score at Level 1 or below. This would include immigrant adults who have higher levels of education attainment from other countries, but who are learning English. It would also include adults who may have a history of interrupted education or a modified education due to a disability. Basing LBS program eligibility on the international survey results is confusing and contradictory. It suggests to service providers that they can work with any adult, including those who have completed their university education. It also suggests that those with 8-10 years of education or less may not be eligible if they can’t complete a test task at Level 1. In essence, the international literacy survey levels suggest that the LBS program supports learners who are at the secondary and postsecondary levels and beyond, but not the least educated.

²⁹ Page 31 in Statistics Canada (2012) *Skills in Canada: first Results from the Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC)*. Available at <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/89-555-x/89-555-x2013001-eng.pdf>

OALCF and Milestone Development

Our document analysis of the OALCF Curriculum Framework, the Milestones and related support materials reveals that the OALCF and the Milestones were primarily designed to supply data for accountability purposes and were not designed to support learners and learning. They constitute a compliance-centred approach to accountability and not a learner- and learning centred approach. We can see this in several ways. The OALCF reform

- Introduces a novel literacy pedagogy referred to as task-based learning and introduces the information-processing approach to reading
- Introduces a novel approach to curriculum framework development focused on task complexity rather than individual skill acquisition
- Disengages instructors and learners from the assessment and accountability process
- Doesn't represent or measure program learning
- Does not provide instructors with pedagogically useful information about test results
- Uses assessment results to make high-stakes decisions about program funding without comprehensive validity and reliability analysis.

A Novel Pedagogy: Literacy learning as task-based learning

Most of the Milestone test tasks present a text that a person could possibly encounter in their daily lives followed by a series of test questions. For example, the test-taker could be asked to read a course description, a company policy handbook or a building directory (illustrated below using the only sample Milestone available). However, the test tasks are not exact duplicates of actual texts that an individual learner encounters in day-to-day life but are re-constructed approximations that may or may not relate to an individual's actual experiences and reasons for being in the program. In addition, the follow-up test questions regulate and restrict how one might respond to a similar text in their daily lives.

The Milestone test tasks represent what is called task-based learning in the OALCF: "Tasks are purposeful activities that bundle skills, knowledge and behaviours in unique ways..."³⁰. The concept of task-based learning is used to construct the Milestones, and it is intended to be used to anatomize and coordinate program learning activity.

³⁰ Page 3 in Ontario Ministry of Training Colleges and Universities (2011) *Ontario Adult Literacy Curriculum Framework: Curriculum Framework*. Available at http://www.tcu.gov.on.ca/eng/eopg/publications/OALCF_Curriculum_Framework_Oct_11.pdf

While the six competencies provide an overall organizational structure, the task-based nature of the Curriculum Framework supports practitioners as they determine how to teach and assess learning³¹.

The task-based approach constitutes a literacy learning pedagogy, and is explicitly described in the OALCF document: *Practitioner Guide to Task-based Programming*³². Just as each Milestone is constructed using the OALCF Curriculum Framework, day-to-day learning activities are to be formulated using the framework and basic principles used to create the Milestones.

The test questions are based on the 5Ws format, which is commonly used as part of a range of reading comprehension activities in school settings. However, only this aspect of a reading comprehension ap-

Figure 1: Sample Milestone Test Task

| BUILDING DIRECTORY | | | |
|--------------------|----------------------|----------------|----------|
| 102 | Blackwell, Jean | Administration | 945-5587 |
| 109 | Dorchynski, Melville | | |
| 102 | Singh, Michael | | |
| 105 | Yee, Karen | | |
| 304 | Mastroianni, Laura | English | 945-5262 |
| 301 | Ramirez, Jose | | |
| 302 | Reid, Johanna | | |
| 302 | Willis, Ken | | |
| 201 | Johnson, Terri | Mathematics | 945-5521 |
| 201 | Nguyen, Ellen | | |
| 204 | Solovyov, Boris | | |
| 103 | Atkinson, Jerome | Science | 945-5594 |
| 106 | Garcia, Teresa | | |
| 103 | Gupta, Raj | | |
| 101 | Henry, Michelle | | |
| 104 | Khan, Nishi | | |
| 103 | Kozlov, Vlad | | |
| 104 | Shuster, Samantha | | |
| 303 | Borges, Claudio | Languages | 945-5263 |

Task B: Response Sheet

Learner name: _____ Date: _____

Answer the questions below by referring to the building directory. You do not need to write your answers in complete sentences.

7. Who works in room 301?

8. What room number does Ms Nguyen work in?

9. In which department does Teresa work?

10. What is the telephone number of Johanna Reid's department?

11. Which department(s) is located on the third floor?

12. Who shares an office with Raj Gupta?

proach is used. Other, more complex aspects are not incorporated. This approach has two pedagogical implications that advantage some learners and disadvantage others. When used in combination with decontextualized and abstract texts, the 5Ws approach requires a strong basis of reading skills and knowledge. The sample also includes complicated phrasing, such as “In which department does Teresa work?” and

³¹ As above

³² Ontario Ministry of Training Colleges and Universities (2011) *Practitioner Guide to Task-based Programming*. Available at http://www.tcu.gov.on.ca/eng/eopg/publications/OALCF_Task-Based_Prog_Mar_11.pdf

“Which department(s) is located on the third floor?” These elements combine to disadvantage learners with limited educational experiences.

Statements of Difficulty and Complexity for Test Tasks not Skill Acquisition

The main competencies and task groups related to reading, writing, listening, speaking and math are described using sets of criteria called descriptors. An overall complexity indicator statement is used to describe each task group and level. For example, at Level 1 for the task group Read Continuous Text, the overall indicator is “Read brief texts to locate specific details”. More detailed statements describe the difficulty of the text (task descriptors) and the skills used by the learner (performance descriptors). An example of performance and task descriptors for the task group Read Continuous Text at Level 1 is provided in Table 8.

Table 8: Example of Complexity Indicators and Descriptors for Level 1 Read Continuous Text

| Performance Descriptors | Task Descriptors |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decodes words and makes meaning of sentences in a single text • Reads short texts to locate a single piece of information • Follows the sequence of events in straightforward chronological texts • Follows simple, straightforward instructional texts • Identifies the main idea in brief texts • Requires support to identify sources and to evaluate and integrate information | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scope of task is limited • Involves one text • Is up to one paragraph in length • Contains common, familiar vocabulary • Has a familiar context • Addresses concrete, day-to-day topics • Has a highly explicit purpose |

A novel concept in the OALCF compared to previous frameworks, and the predominant approach to framework development in education, is using skill criteria statements to describe the test task and not the skills acquired by the learner. The task descriptors and learner performance descriptors “are intended to work in combination with each other to foster understanding of task complexity at a given level within a given task group.”³³ They are not intended to provide instructors with an understanding of individual literacy skill development, and instructors are not to use the statements to develop rubrics and checklists to monitor the development of specific literacy and numeracy skills. Such a substantial shift in the use of criteria statements within a curriculum framework creates confusions and contradictions for instructors.

³³ See page 7 in *Ontario Adult Literacy Curriculum Framework: Curriculum Framework*

Milestones Aren't Designed to Measure Program Learning and Don't Provide Useful Results

Descriptions about Milestone uses and their results are carefully crafted to limit their usefulness within the context of teaching and learning. Such limitations are confusing for practitioners and instructors who expect some pedagogical usefulness. They are also contradictory for the funder and their PMF. If they have limited uses within the program, how can they be useful for the system?

First, Milestones are not designed to represent program learning and the program-based accomplishments of learners, only their potential application of those skills once they leave the program.

The Milestones are designed to mimic possible literacy related applications in a variety of contexts, such as work, further education and life at home and in the community. The intention is to select specific Milestones at the beginning of the program, once a goal and learner ability has been established, and then “work towards” and develop the skills, knowledge and abilities necessary to complete the chosen Milestone³⁴. They are not intended to represent the development and use of those skills, knowledge and abilities. Instead, they are designed to represent the sorts of tasks a learner *might* encounter once they have met their goal and completed the program: “Milestones are intended to reflect the types of tasks learners will need to perform once they reach their goals”³⁵.

Second, instructors are cautioned *not* to rely on the results in order to make informed decisions about progress related to achieving goals and transitioning out of the LBS program and into training, work or further education.

*They are one way for learners to see that they are developing the abilities necessary to complete goal-related tasks.*³⁶

*It cannot be concluded that individuals are ready to transition because they have successfully completed their selected Milestones.*³⁷

Furthermore, instructors are not to rely on the Milestones even to determine a learner's competency within a specific task group and at a specific level in the OALCF.

*It cannot be assumed that a learner who has successfully completed a Milestone will be able to perform other tasks at the same level or in the same task group.*³⁸

³⁴ See pages 7-8 in *Milestones User Guide*

³⁵ As above

³⁶ Page 4

³⁷ Page 5

³⁸ As above

Finally, instructors are encouraged to use a variety of other assessments to make informed decisions about learner progress, their abilities and goal related achievements. In other words, the carefully crafted limitations regarding the usefulness of the Milestones demonstrate that they provide little relevant information about learner progress to the instructor and learner. Their primary use is to provide a measure for reporting purposes.

Two uses, stated without cautions are related to the management and administration of LBS programs.

They provide a common way for service providers to describe learner performance for reporting and referral purposes.

Milestones also provide MTCU with information about learner progress.³⁹

On the one hand, Milestones were designed to inform about progress, but on the other instructors are advised not rely on Milestones for the same purpose.

Milestone Administration Restrictions

Further emphasizing their reporting and compliance function over teaching and learning are the administration guidelines designed to develop standardized test administration and scoring, although the tests themselves are not standardized. We analysed and summarized key administration guidelines to point out how they are designed to restrict the involvement of instructors and learners in the assessment process demonstrating that they are designed to fulfill a reporting function rather than a pedagogical function. In other words, they do not support the use of assessments for teaching and learning, but only to supply data to the program funder⁴⁰:

- Whenever possible, only a designated assessor should administer the Milestones to ensure “objective” and “reliable” results; it is recommended that instructors should not be involved in the process.
- Assessors are to avoid making any modifications to the content of the Milestones, including adaptations for learners who are Deaf and communicate in ASL or who may have vision challenges
- Learners are not permitted to use supports such as dictionaries or notes (occasionally a calculator can be used when specified).
- Milestones are to be completed in a monitored setting during a pre-set time to separate the process from regular activities.

³⁹ Page 4, *Milestones User Guide*

⁴⁰ From pages 9-12, *Milestones User Guide*

- Content related questions and discussion are not permitted. Assessors are directed to only repeat instructions as written. In some instances, assessors are permitted to read instructions aloud.
- Assessors are directed to wait six weeks before allowing a learner to attempt to re-do an incomplete Milestone. This waiting period means that learners will likely forget the content. As an alternative, an assessor can have the learner complete a different Milestone. However, this may be challenging for some learners and programs as new content must be learned. Individual programs are directed to store Milestones in a single, secure location that is accessible only by the assessor. Assessors are directed to limit follow-up discussions with learners, avoid discussing the specific content and avoid showing the learner the Milestone task just completed.
- Assessors are directed to provide feedback using only the wording of the OALCF complexity indicators (i.e. “you were able to interpret documents to locate information” or “you have trouble finding details”).

The administration processes disconnect both learners and instructors from the assessment process. Data reveals a series of barriers and challenges created by the administration guidelines, which will be fully explored.

Unique Features of Use Digital Technology Milestones

The digital technology Milestones have several unique features that may them more appealing compared to other Milestone tasks. Their connection to the Essentials Skills framework and international literacy survey methodology is limited. They do not incorporate the information-processing model, the principles of content development and test question development used for other Milestone test tasks.

They are not made-up approximations of a literacy tasks but are actual activities carried out in a digital environment. For example, to complete Milestone 54 a learner is directed to log into a user account. This could be any account and would likely be a familiar and easily recognized account for the learner. Rather than facing a pen and paper approximation of a text, which may or may not be recognized by and familiar to the learner, as in the case of the sample Milestone, the learner is able to engage with previously seen text and can choose which account to log into. Furthermore, the learner does not have to respond to a particular set of questions. Rather than respond to a series of 5Ws questions directing the learner to locate and identify information, the learner is simply directed to log into his or her account, carrying out the task in testing situation the same way it would be performed outside the testing situation. This ensures that the test task is situated in learners’ lives, familiar and authentic. Milestone 55 operates in a similar way, requiring the learner to perform an Internet search using search criteria for a site of his or her choice. This is followed up with a five-item checklist completed by the assessor indicating task completion. In addition,

Milestone 56 also allows test-takers to make choices about what they will do, and is followed by a simple criteria checklist.

Summary

The OALCF is based on the Essential Skills framework, which in turn, is derived in part from a methodological design devised for a series of large scale international literacy survey projects overseen by the OECD. Transposing elements from an international testing methodology into the OALCF results in a series of limitations, challenges and contradictions that indicate the OECD testing methods are inappropriate in an educational context.

- The OALCF merely has a surface-level connection to its underpinning conceptual model, a connection primarily based on semantics and not operational procedures
- The OALCF operates in its own unique way without a strong methodological connection to either the Essential Skills or the OECD's international literacy surveys
- This means that the OALCF Milestones operate distinctly from standardized spin-off tests, such as ESEE, PDQ, and TOWES, making alignments challenging
- The OALCF descriptors, regulated by the OECD's level descriptions, are describing test task scoring and not individual abilities; the level descriptions do not provide information about individual abilities
- Since the level descriptors were initially designed to describe a series of test tasks, they only have meaning and use when examining these tasks; on their own, they do not provide pedagogically useful information about literacy development
- A unique model of reading called information-processing is used in the international testing initiative; it was not derived from theories related to learning to read
- The information-processing model is distinct from a reading comprehension model used in school-based literacy testing and standardized reading tests
- International literacy survey test tasks are reconstructed approximations of actual textual formats and do not contain specific contextual cues such as logos and recognizable names and places; the Milestones are developed in a similar way
- Ontario is the first and only known jurisdiction in the world to have adapted and mandated the use of frameworks and assessments derived from international literacy survey methods for educational and pedagogical purposes

- The international literacy survey framework was not designed to recognize the abilities of adults who have less than 8-10 years of formal education, the very learners in the LBS system.

Both the design and administration of the Milestones combine to create a compliance mechanism that provides scant information about progress and literacy development.

Milestone results are not used to decide whether a learner will pass a course, achieve a goal, or transition into further education and training. In fact, guidelines advise assessors not to rely on the Milestones for this type of information. The Milestones also have a contradictory value. They are a low-stakes test for adult learners since their results are not used to indicate program achievements. However, they are used as an indicator of program performance in determining funding allocations. This makes them a high-stakes test for LBS programs. Assessors must 'sell' the value of the Milestones to learners and explain why they are subjected to testing that has no impact on their individual goals and program achievements.

MTCU has not developed adequate testing accommodations for learners with learning disabilities, mild developmental disabilities, vision challenges, or other disabilities. There is no ASL version of the Milestones to accommodate Deaf learners. Simple modifications and adaptations to test tasks, such as increasing the font size for learners with vision challenges, are not permitted.

Only designated assessors can access all 60 Milestones. This prevents instructors and practitioners who are not assessors from analysing their content in order to make professional decisions about their use with particular learners, and to adequately prepare their learners. Guidelines also describe how assessors should restrict the way they discuss the test with learners and provide support before, during and after the test. They are not permitted to provide interpretive information related to content and test instructions, nor are they permitted to provide relevant details about test results to learners or their instructors that could be used to help learners complete additional Milestones. Administration guidelines claim the restrictions are necessary in order to achieve 'objective' and 'reliable' results. However, as will be described, there are numerous reasons why this aim is unachievable, including the design of the most commonly used and reported Milestones.

Part 3: LBS Program Overview

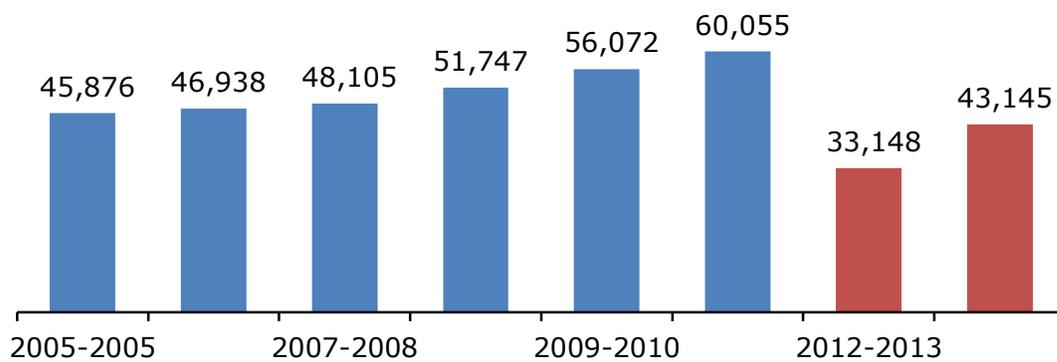
The first part of this section contains an LBS program overview based on data collected using both the previous reporting system (Information Management System or IMS) and the current reporting mechanism (EOIS-CaMS). The data was examined to provide a current program overview and a context for understanding the findings. It will be referred to in subsequent sections.

Also included in this section of the report are survey and interview findings that describe overall impacts of the OALCF including time pressures related to implementing the OALCF, the development of extensive and time-consuming intake processes, particularly for community-based programs, and the on-going use of additional assessments and curriculum frameworks.

LBS Programs: Learner Enrolment, Age, Goal Paths, Education

In 2013-2014 a total of 43,145 adults participated in LBS programs across Ontario⁴¹. This number includes those who participated in distance learning (5,553) and attended programs in-person (37,592). The number of enrolments is down by over one-quarter compared to a recent peak in LBS participation in 2011-2012. Figure 2 provides an overview of LBS learner numbers from 2005-2006⁴² until the most recent year that data is available⁴³. The blue bars are pre-OALCF numbers and the red bars are post OALCF

Figure 2: Total LBS Learners 2005-2014



⁴¹ Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) Report Fiscal Year 2013-2014.

⁴² Data from Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities. *LBS activity report – reporting period from April 1, 2009 – February 28, 2010* and Essential Skills Ontario. (2012). *Literacy and Essential Skills in Ontario*. Retrieved from http://www.essentialskillsontario.ca/sites/www.essentialskillsontario.ca/files/Literacy%20and%20Essential%20Skills%20in%20Ontario_Final2.pdf

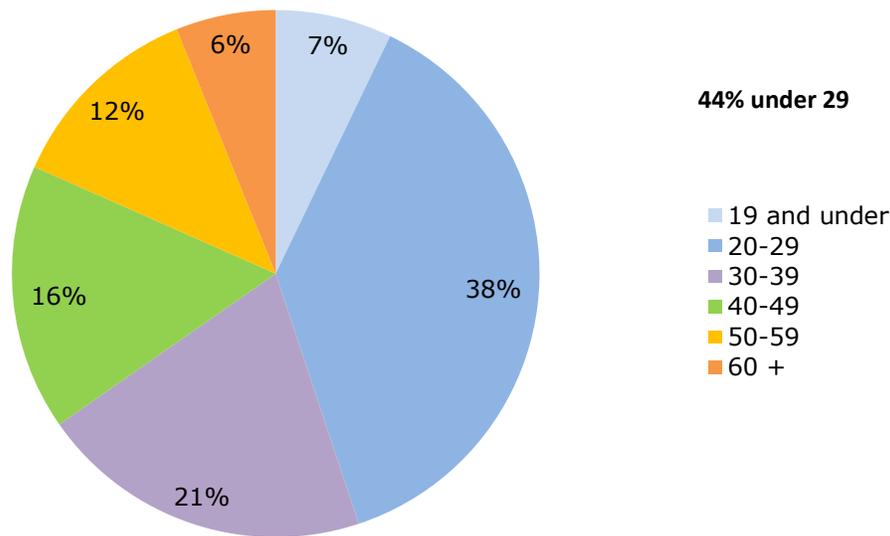
⁴³ We were not able to access data for 2010-2011.

numbers. Exploring the reason for these decreases is beyond the scope of this project. However, it is likely that many are due to reporting changes and do not reflect actual drops in program enrollment.

Age of Learners

In 2013-2014, close to half of all learners (44%) in programs were under the age of 29, including a small proportion (7%) under the age of 19. Figure 3 provides additional details of the age distributions.

Figure 3: Age of LBS Learners 2013-2014



The age distribution does not align with the ministry’s suitability indicator, which directs programs to work with learners who are “older than 45 years of age and under 65”⁴⁴. The vast majority (74%) of learners in programs are under the age of 45, and just over one-fifth (22%) meet the suitability indicator. Further, a second ministry suitability indicator directing programs to work with adults who have “been out of education or without being involved with training for 6 years or more”⁴⁵ is not aligned with program realities, as close one-third (29%) of all learners are under the age of 24.

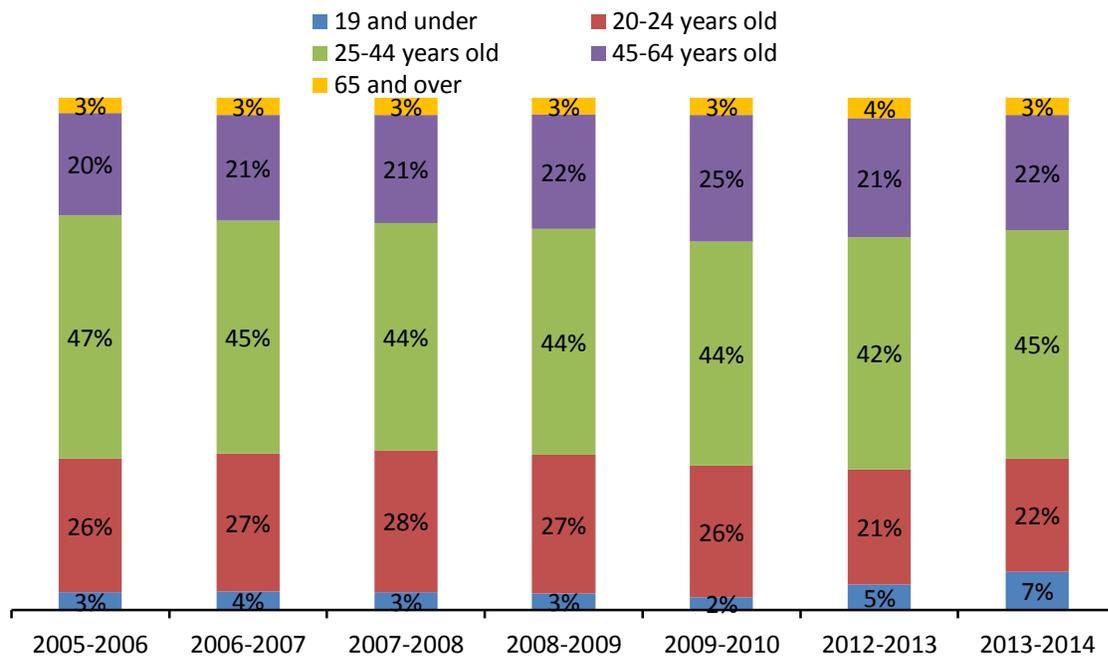
The age-related profile has remained relatively stable since 2005-2006 with the exception of the youngest learners under the age of 19. Although a small proportion of learners, they have more than doubled in size from 3% to 7%. There has been a slight decrease in the number of 20-24 year olds from 26% to 22%,

⁴⁴ Literacy and Basic Skills Service Provider Guidelines, 2012, p. 43.

⁴⁵ As above

along with a very slight decrease in the number of 25-44 year olds. The 45-65 year old category has remained stable throughout the years, ranging between 20% and 22%. There was however a slight increase in 2009-2010 to 25% that lasted only one year. The 65 and over category has remained stable.

Figure 4: Age of Learners from 2005 to 2014



Learner Goal Paths

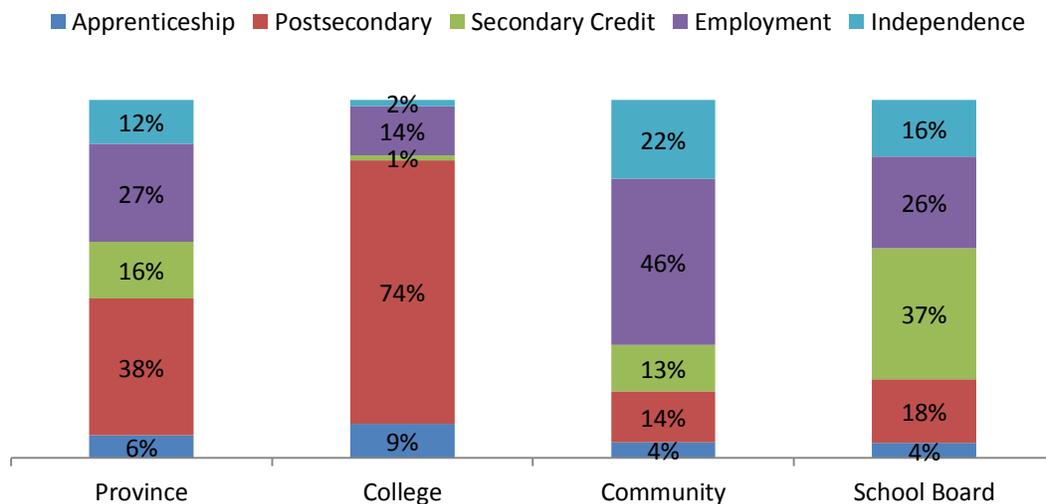
The LBS system is organized by five goal paths that are used to indicate the general purpose of program participation and guiding curricular aims. Each learner must identify a goal path upon enrolment. The five goal paths are the following: Apprenticeship, Employment, Independence, Postsecondary, and Secondary Credit. The data provided in this section supports later arguments about the distribution of goal path selection and the lack of alignment between Milestones and academic goals.

With the introduction of the OALCF, the goal paths were expanded from three to five. A previous category, further education, was articulated more explicitly naming apprenticeship, postsecondary and secondary credit goal paths. These three goal paths are similar in that they all address academic literacy de-

velopment using the provincial education curriculum as a regulating guide. Both the employment and independence goal paths remained unchanged with the introduction of the OALCF. Provincially, the majority (60%) of learners are pursuing one of the three academic goals (i.e. apprenticeship, postsecondary or secondary). Just over one-quarter (27%) have identified an employment goal and only slightly more than one-tenth (12%) have identified an independence goal. Individual programs identify their own targets related to the number of learners in each goal path.

When we examine goal path distribution by sector, school boards closely mirror the provincial distribution. A combined majority (59%) of learners in school board programs have an academic goal. Not surprisingly, most of these learners (37%) want to access the secondary system. Very similar to the provincial profile, just over one-quarter (26%) have an employment goal and 16% have an independence goal. Both colleges and community-based programs have their own distinct goal path profiles. The vast majority (74%) of adult learners in colleges want to access PSE, and nearly all (84%) are there to develop their literacy and numeracy abilities for academic purposes. Only 14% have identified an employment goal, and a mere 2% identified an independence goal. In contrast, nearly half (46%) of the adults in community-based programs have an employment goal and just under one-quarter have an independence goal. Well over one-quarter (31%) have an academic goal.

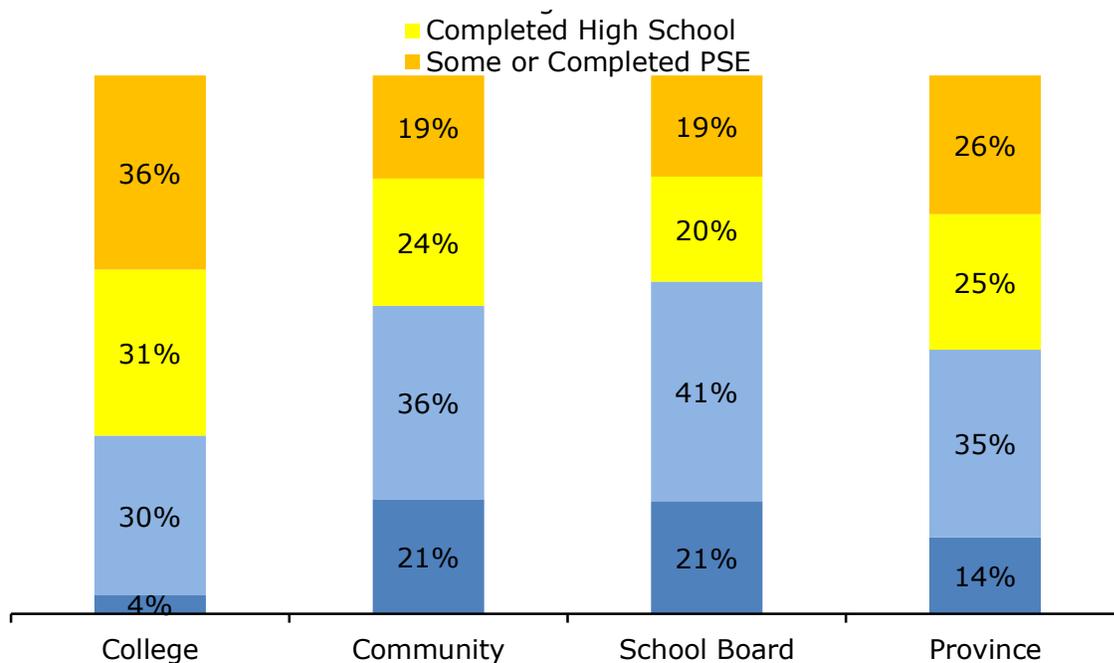
Figure 5: LBS Learner Goal Paths 2013-2014



Education Attainment

The education attainment profiles are also distinct. Learners with the most education can be found in college programs where a substantial majority (66%) have a completed high school education, in addition to some postsecondary level training and education (including trades) and a completed postsecondary education, including university. Further, the colleges see only a small fraction (4%) of adults with the least amount of education. This means that the colleges are working with those adults who enter the LBS program with the greatest educational resources. In comparison, school board and community-based programs share a similar profile. The majority of their learners have less than high school, including one-fifth in each sector who only have 0-8 years of education. Both sectors would face similar challenges working with learners with much fewer educational resources and abilities developed in school settings. Provincially, just over half of all learners (51%) in programs exceed the minimum education level suitability indicator, which is less than a Grade 12 level of education⁴⁶.

Figure 6: Learner Education Attainment 2013-2014



⁴⁶ As above

Accommodating the OALCF

Work Responsibilities and Time Pressures

We asked about a variety of work responsibilities and time pressures, as we were interested in learning more about the overall impacts of curriculum reform. Overall, when counting all responses across four time categories, half (50%) of the total number of responses fell in the ‘barely enough time’ category, followed by 38% in the ‘enough time’ category, 11% in the ‘absolutely no time’ category and only 1% in the ‘more than enough time’ category. The majority of responses (61%) indicate that assessors are experiencing a general sense of time pressure, with one-tenth feeling particularly under pressure to complete daily work responsibilities. When the Milestones Review was conducted only six months after the introduction of the OALCF, over half (56%) of respondents indicated that the introduction of the Milestones accompanying reporting requirements increased their work load and responsibilities⁴⁷. Our data indicates that the increased demands have not decreased, and are being acutely experienced by some. The findings also indicate that there are striking differences between sectors, with those in school board, and community-based programs in particular, experiencing more time pressures and increased work load.

We looked more closely at the differences in response numbers between categories that indicate respondents have ‘enough time’ or ‘barely enough time’ to devote to 11 listed work responsibilities. The differences indicate that assessors could be prioritizing their responsibilities and making the time to ensure that certain key responsibilities are met over others. In general, responses indicate that respondents have ‘enough time’ for activities integral to the operation and funding of the program such as registration and intake, teaching and training with students and administering assessments, both Milestones and additional assessments. However, other activities and work responsibilities such as program administration, program development and outreach, and staff and volunteer support and training are activities that respondents say they have ‘barely enough time’ to do.

We also examined the data by sector. The numbers are small so we can only report on general trends and tendencies. When comparing the ‘enough time’ and ‘barely enough time’ categories by sector, community-based programs have consistently more responses in the ‘barely enough time’ category for each of the 11 responsibilities listed. Particularly worrisome are two times as many responses in the ‘barely enough time’ category related to teaching and learning, a core activity. Responses from school board assessors are very similar to those from community-based assessors, indicating that both assessors from both sectors are experiencing more time pressures in a core activity compared to their college sector colleagues.

⁴⁷ *Milestones Review Project*, page 34.

We also examined differences between sectors in the ‘not-applicable’ category used to indicate that an assessor’s role did not include a particular responsibility. Respondents working in community-based programs were twice as likely as those working in college programs to indicate that they were responsible for certain activities in seven of the 11 categories. In comparison, respondents from school boards were twice as likely to state that only one of the 11 responsibilities was not part of their work routines compared to community-based respondents. This indicates that both community-based and school board program assessors can have more responsibilities than their college colleagues. The largest difference was related to registration and intake. Respondents from college programs were three times as likely to say this was *not* one of their responsibilities, compared to those from community-based and school board programs. These differences between sectors indicate that community-based programs, and to a lesser extent school boards, are experiencing the impacts of the OALCF differently compared to colleges. The OALCF curricular reforms and accompanying reporting requirements exacerbated existing differences in work load and responsibilities. Changes have impacted community-based programs to a greater extent.

Assessments in Use

An overwhelming majority (89%) of respondents stated that they use more than Milestones in their assessment practices. The most commonly chosen tool is CABS, closely followed by program developed/other tools.

We grouped the total number of responses according to the underpinning model used to develop the assessment: 1) the information-processing model used in the OECD adult literacy survey and related spin-off tests; and 2) a school-based reading comprehension model. Considered to be aligned with the reading comprehension approach is the assessment developed as part of what is called ESKARGO⁴⁸ materials. This tool was developed to supplement the OALCF Curriculum Framework and Milestones by providing comprehensive and detailed lists of decontextualized skills and knowledge organized by the levels, competencies and task groups in the OALCF. Included in the ESKARGO materials in an intake assessment designed to assess whether or not an individual has acquired some of those decontextualized skills and knowledge using a series of mini tests and exercises.

As shown in the table below, the most common type of additional assessments are those that follow a reading comprehension model.

⁴⁸ What is commonly referred to as ESKARGO and the welcome package or intake assessment can be found in the following two documents: 1) OALCF Implementation Strategy Resource (ISR) and 2) Embedded Skills, Knowledge and Attitudes Reference Guide for Ontario (ESKARGO) at <http://www.lbspractitionertraining.com/oalcf/eskargo-a-oalcf-implementation-strategy-resource>

Table 9: Assessments Used

| | Number of Responses (220) | Percent |
|--|----------------------------------|----------------|
| Tools aligned with reading comprehension and academic models (i.e. CAAT, CABS, CARA, Accuplacer, GED related, Nelson-Denny, ESKARGO intake assessment) | 118 | 54% |
| Tools aligned with the international literacy assessment framework (i.e. PDQ, TOWES, CAMERA, ESEE, Read Forward, OALCF task-based activities) | 65 | 30% |
| Canadian Language Benchmarks | 9 | 4% |
| Mixture of tools | 7 | 4% |
| Unknown, local tools, math or computer only focus | 20 | 9% |

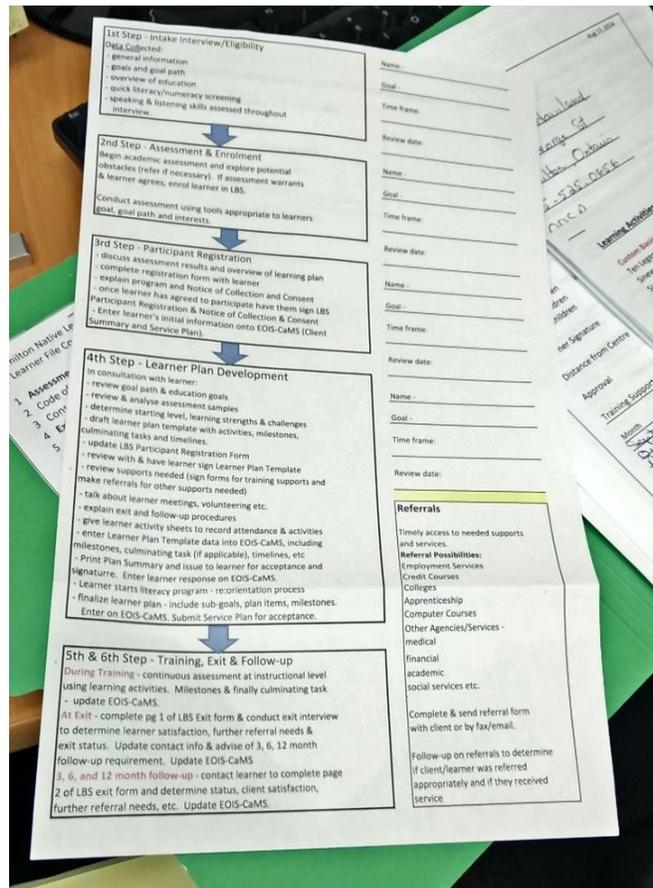
Respondents provided several reasons for using additional assessments. The synthesized statements are listed in order of the most common reasons to the least common:

- Better suited to program/learners/curricular approach/secondary and postsecondary entry/literacy pedagogy (32%)
- For variety, big picture, more information in general, to complement and enhance the Milestone results, and prepare learners to take Milestone tests (25%)
- To learn more about specific literacy and learning skills, knowledge, understandings such as comprehension, vocabulary, grammar, etc.) (16%)
- To supplement the short-comings of the Milestones (9%)
- To use more suitable tools that are easy to use, incorporate clear language principles, are culturally appropriate, or have a computer focus (4%)

Two interview participants provided additional details about their intake and registration processes. Both of the participants work in community-based programs, one in a small town in northern Ontario and one in a support agency for First Nations learners. Overall, the intake and assessment processes they describe are time consuming and extensive than those described by participants working in colleges and school boards. This is likely the result of their size and focus on individualized programming. One assessor explained that she spends half a day on assessment with each new student. She then added that they often don't return. She attributed the decision to the individual, and a possible personal challenge.

Another assessor and program coordinator refers to an extensive checklist and flowchart that she developed to support her intake process (see Figure 7).

Figure 7: Intake Checklist



It contains approximately 20 items that must be addressed during the intake process. Most of the items are related to LBS requirements. Additional items and information collected are related to the requirements of the organization that sponsors the LBS program. Items include an eligibility checklist, a learning styles inventory, learning barriers list, training support policy (that she developed on her own), results of an intake assessment, and registration papers related to setting up a service plan. It takes about 12 hours for the intake process to be completed for each student. She refers to the process as “putting them in the system” and “developing their curriculum”. Such time consuming and extensive intake processes impact smaller programs in which the coordinator is also the assessor and instructor. Our data obtained from similar programs indicates that these findings are common, however further investigation is needed to fully understand the intake process from the learner’s perspective and to determine if, for instance, this could lead to a decision not to return to the program.

Curriculum Frameworks in Use

In addition to using a range of assessment tools, survey respondents also use additional curriculum frameworks. This means they are consulting more than the OALCF framework to develop learning materials

and activities. The vast majority (86%) of the choices are related to the use of frameworks aligned with an academic/reading comprehension model, including the use of previous LBS standards and outcomes frameworks⁴⁹. Similar to the assessments, we also grouped the frameworks according to their underpinning approach and alignment with either a reading comprehension or information-processing model. The most common choice was the use of the OALCF curriculum support framework ESKARGO. When this category is combined with the use of other reading comprehension frameworks, the vast majority of responses are aligned with the use of reading comprehension and school-based approaches. The remainder are a diverse mixture, which could include frameworks aligned with a reading comprehension approach such as the Canadian Language Benchmarks. A total of 138 assessors responded to the questions and made a total of 295 choices, making at least two choices each. This indicates that assessors are not relying on the OALCF Curriculum Framework for fundamental curricular support.

Table 10: Curriculum Frameworks Used

| | Number of Responses (295) | Percent |
|---|---------------------------|---------|
| Curriculum frameworks aligned with reading comprehension and academic models (i.e. Ontario Ministry of Education elementary and secondary curriculum documents, LBS Level Descriptions Manual, LBS Matrix, ACE curriculum) | 153 | 52% |
| OALCF curriculum support framework (i.e. ESKARGO) | 100 | 34% |
| Additional (i.e. Read Forward, US Common Core, Canadian Language Benchmarks, Canadian Language benchmarks for Literacy Learners, Essential Skills framework, PSE curriculum) | 42 | 14% |

Respondents provided several reasons for using additional frameworks, many of which are similar to their reasons for using additional assessment tools. Most of these comments however, were related more to the use of learning activities rather than a comment on the usefulness of a specific framework and have not been compiled in the same way as the assessment comments. There are however a few comments about the need to use additional frameworks related to the limitations of the OALCF:

- o OALCF is mainly assessment*
- o To cover the required learning in individual goal paths.*

⁴⁹ Terms such as curriculum framework, standards, skills and outcomes frameworks are used to describe a similar approach to the development of curriculum frameworks for literacy learning, all of which contain the following organizing elements: 1) skill domains and sub-domains, a leveling system, and lists of decontextualized skills that are assembled and organized according to level of difficulty.

o They are familiar and time-tested.

In addition, college programs have an established curriculum framework in use, the Academic and Career Entrance (ACE) curriculum, which makes the OALCF inconsequential, according to one respondent: “Learners with postsecondary [goals] want materials/documents that will work with ACE, and do not understand/or care about OALCF.” The ACE curriculum was designed to have a direct connection with senior secondary courses. However, since the OALCF does not prescribe the use of a specific curriculum it was not designed to have a direct connection with ACE and support transitions. Completed ACE courses are recognized by colleges as course pre-requisites that are equivalent to secondary credits. In addition, college programs can award a provincially recognized high school equivalency certificate based on the ACE curriculum.

During interviews, one college instructor and coordinator recognized the value of ACE, and related secondary school curricula, and their usefulness in providing important pedagogical and instructional guidance for college LBS programs. She pointed out how community programs are at disadvantage without such explicit guidance.

Community-based are the ones I feel the most for. They don't have a certificate to get to. There's no Grade 12 equivalent, no Grade 12 secondary school credit. They don't have that. So that is a much bigger challenge. You can't really develop a curriculum that will get people to all.

She thought that perhaps the OALCF is being used for instructional guidance, similar to the way that secondary and postsecondary programs rely on the provincial K-12 curriculum. However, she cautioned, even if community programs are using the OALCF for instruction, they “shouldn't rely solely” on it. This idea will be further explored in the next section focused on describing various Milestone selection strategies.

Re-inserting LBS Outcomes into the OALCF Curriculum Framework

ESKARGO, a curricular resource designed to supplement the OALCF was initially developed by the school board sector to support learners in the secondary credit path. The intent was to supplement the OALCF framework by developing extensive listings of the skills and knowledge needed to complete OALCF example tasks and Milestones. Many of these lists were derived from LBS outcomes indicators found in *The Level Descriptions Manual* and *Working with Learning Outcomes (Validation Draft)*. Survey respondents stated that they use ESKARGO for the following reasons:

- o It helps me decide what competency, task, learning activities and skill sets are needed so the learners can successfully do the Milestones and Culminating Task related to their goal path.*
- o Show progress to learners*
- o Detailed, relevant, understandable, coherent, cohesive list of specific outcomes/expectations*
- o ESKARGO and other documents from CESBA make the OALCF Curriculum Framework usable! Provides tangible guidance for program administrators and instructors to follow and adopt into programming.*

However, one respondent who appears to work in a community-based volunteer program, found both the OALCF and ESKARGO challenging to use:

We found that the OALCF was too vague for tutors, while ESKARGO had far too much information for tutors. We took the two frameworks and developed Checklists and Tracking Cards that work for our tutors.

Similarly, an interview participant, in a small community-based program, described how she had developed and adapted her own materials, including an intake assessment: “Sometimes I don’t like the stuff that they give us so I just do my own.”

Summary

Data from two reporting systems reveal the following about the current profile of LBS programs:

- Dramatic drops and subsequent rebounds in enrolment numbers indicate there were reporting challenges the first year that EOIS-CaMS was introduced
- However, all sectors have numbers that are down by about a third when comparing 2013-2014, the second year of the OALCF, to 2011-2012
- The vast majority (74%) of learners in programs are under the age of 45, and just over one-fifth (22%) meet one of the 12 suitability indicators (i.e. between the ages of 45 and 64).
- The majority (60%) of learners in the system have identified an academic goal (i.e. apprenticeship, postsecondary or secondary)
- The vast majority (84%) of learners in the college sector have a distinctly academic focused profile

- In comparison, community-based programs have a non-academic profile, and the majority (68%) of learners have employment and independence goals
- By far, learners with the highest levels of education are in college programs
- Learners with the least amount of education are found equally in community-based and school board programs
- Provincially, just over half of all learners (51%) in programs exceed the minimum education level suitability indicator (i.e. less than a Grade 12 education) and a strong majority (67%) in colleges have completed Grade 12

In addition, survey and interview data reveal some of the impacts of the OALCF on day-to-day program practices:

- The majority (61%) of respondents indicate they feel a general sense of time pressure, with one-tenth feeling particularly under pressure to complete daily work responsibilities.
- Differences between sectors indicate that community-based programs, and to a slightly lesser extent school boards, are experiencing the impacts of the OALCF differently compared to colleges. The OALCF curricular reforms and accompanying reporting requirements exacerbated existing differences in work load and responsibilities. Changes have impacted community-based programs to a greater extent.
- An overwhelming majority (89%) of respondents use more than Milestones in their assessment practices; the most commonly chosen tool is CABS, which was developed to align with the previous LBS framework and reading comprehension approach, closely followed by program developed/other tools. This indicates that Milestones place an additional administrative burden on delivery programs as they are tied to reporting while existing practices are maintained to inform programming.
- Time consuming and extensive intake processes were described by two interview participants working in small community-based programs. Their experiences illustrate the inequitable work load between community-based assessors and those in the college who were three times as likely to say registration and intake was not one of their typical responsibilities.
- Survey respondents also use additional curriculum frameworks to develop learning materials and plan activities; the vast majority (86%) of their choices are related to the use of frameworks aligned with an academic/reading comprehension model, including the use of previous LBS standards and outcomes frameworks

- Programs with an established curriculum based on the provincial secondary school curriculum, although not prescribed by the OALCF, have an advantage compared to those programs focused on supporting independence and employment goals, as they do not have the same access to important pedagogical and instructional guidance. Many programs without an established curriculum have made great efforts to bring programming in alignment with the OALCF drawing on fewer resources.
- A resource (i.e. ESKARGO) designed to supplement the OALCF by re-inserting skill lists used in previous LBS frameworks is widely used by respondents.

Part 4: How Milestone Challenges Play Out in the Data

Milestone use challenges are directly reflected in EOIS-CaMS data which reveals the following:

1. Assessors are relying on two digital technology Milestones to meet the reporting target and ensure learners have a completed Milestone
2. Assessors rely on manage learning Milestone 57 to open a plan
3. Assessors limit their use of the Milestones and use them to meet reporting targets but not as a progress indicator
4. The differences in selection and completion rates, particularly when comparing education levels, demonstrate the inequitable impacts of the Milestones.

Reliance on MS 54 and MS 55 to Ensure a Completed Milestone

The table below displays the top 10 most commonly used Milestones, including a focused look at Milestones completed in French.⁵⁰ The two digital technology Milestones comprise 18% (and 19% in Francophone programs) of all completed Milestones, but only represent 3% of the set of 60 Milestones. In addition, the third digital technology Milestone, completed in French, is also in the top 10 list. Together, the three digital technology Milestones comprise 21% of completed Milestones in Francophone programs.⁵¹

Table 11: Top 10 Completed Milestones

| | Milestones Completed | | | Milestones Completed in French | | |
|---|-------------------------------|------|-----|---------------------------------|-----|-----|
| | Milestone | # | % | Milestone | # | % |
| 1 | 54 – Log into a user account | 7866 | 12% | 54 – Log into a user account | 593 | 13% |
| 2 | 55 – Search the Internet | 3672 | 6% | 55 – Search the Internet | 294 | 6% |
| 3 | 57 – Begin to manage learning | 3553 | 5% | 1 – Read an ad and email | 195 | 4% |
| 4 | 41– Tell time | 3459 | 5% | 15 – Give directions (verbally) | 186 | 4% |
| 5 | 1 – Read an ad and email | 2281 | 3% | 4 – Read course description | 173 | 4% |
| 6 | 4 – Read course description | 2134 | 3% | 11 – Read table of contents | 168 | 4% |

⁵⁰ This assumes that all learners in the Francophone stream use the French Milestones, which may not necessarily be what happens. It also assumes that learners in other streams do not use French Milestones; again, this may not necessarily be the reality.

⁵¹ Initially, the digital technology Milestones comprised 15% of all selected Milestones on learner plans and 21% of completed Milestones. It appears that the initial inclination to select and have learners complete these two Milestones has remained constant. See Mazulla, M & Geraci, K. (2013)

| | | | | | | |
|----|--------------------------------|------|----|-----------------------------------|-----|----|
| 7 | 37– Compare costs on flyer | 2014 | 3% | 16 – Support opinion (verbally) | 147 | 3% |
| 8 | 43 – Calculate with time sheet | 1985 | 3% | 2 – Read course description | 143 | 3% |
| 9 | 7 – Read textbook section | 1618 | 2% | 31 - Create table for course info | 142 | 3% |
| 10 | 27 – Read course schedule | 1570 | 2% | 56 – Select computer program | 130 | 3% |

The data demonstrate that one-fifth of assessors rely on digital technology Milestones to ensure the reporting target is met.

Reliance on MS 57 to Open a Plan

When examining the data related to Milestone selection, the most commonly selected Milestone by far is MS 57, a Milestone related to learners’ goal setting and management of their own learning. However, MS 57 doesn’t even appear in the top 10 list of most commonly selected French Milestones. Other Milestone selections made by assessors in Francophone programs reflect the overall selection choices. Both digital technology Milestones are commonly selected, as is the easiest reading related Milestone.

Table 12: Most Commonly Selected Milestones

| | Selected Milestones | | | Selected French Milestones | | |
|----|-----------------------------------|-----|-----|------------------------------|----|-----|
| | Milestone | # | % | Milestone | # | % |
| 1 | 57 – Begin to manage learning | 765 | 19% | 1– Read an ad and email | 42 | 10% |
| 2 | 1 – Read an ad and email | 268 | 7% | 55 – Search the Internet | 33 | 8% |
| 3 | 54 – Log into a user account | 162 | 4% | 3 – Read product information | 28 | 6% |
| 4 | 55 – Search the Internet | 137 | 3% | 54 – Log into a user account | 28 | 6% |
| 5 | 3 – Read product information | 123 | 3% | 11 – Read table of contents | 20 | 4% |
| 6 | 22 – Write an email | 119 | 3% | 4 – Read course description | 12 | 3% |
| 7 | 31 – Create table for course info | 98 | 2% | 16 – Express opinion | 12 | 3% |
| 8 | 60 – Engage with others | 89 | 2% | 17 – Deliver a presentation | 12 | 3% |
| 9 | 7 – Read textbook section | 86 | 2% | 22 – Write an email | 12 | 3% |
| 10 | 8 – Read product label/symbols | 84 | 2% | 58 – Set goals | 11 | 3% |

Overall, assessors limit their Milestone selections. Four Milestones, comprising only 7% of the total number of Milestones are selected one third (33%) of the time, and slightly less frequently (30%) by assessors in Francophone programs.

Limited Use of the Milestones Overall

In 2013-2014 a total of 43,145 adults participated in LBS programs across Ontario, and a total of 70,907 Milestones were in progress (selected) and completed on learner plans. That means that a mere 1.6 Milestones were used for each learner in the LBS system. The target is to have one completed MS on 60% of learner plans. The Milestones are primarily being used to meet this target.

Differences between Selection and Completion Rates

Overall, Milestone selection and completion rates are not consistently aligned. Although Milestones 54 and 55 are completed 18% of the time, they are selected only 7% of the time. Aligned selection and completion numbers indicate a straightforward connection, and selected Milestones are administered and completed without complication. Misalignments indicate complications in the process. These complications could be related to reporting requirements, and/or the reliability of the Milestones and the ability of educators to predict that certain learners will complete a Milestone that has been selected.

If selection rates are consistently and substantially higher than completion rates (i.e. high selection/low completion), this could indicate that there are unsuccessful attempts to do the Milestone and instructors are unable to predict whether or not their learners will be successful. If completion rates are consistently and substantially higher than selection (i.e. low selection/high completion), this could indicate that learners can easily complete a Milestone. It could also indicate that the Milestone is not being completed as part of a pre-planned set of activities and learners are not working towards the completion of a selected Milestone, as indicated in the guidelines.

Milestone 1, deemed to be the easiest reading related Milestone, is completed at less than half the rate that it is selected. The situation with the two digital technology Milestones is reversed. Together, they are completed more than twice as often as they are selected. This could indicate that they are being used to ensure reporting compliance. It could also indicate that they are being used because educators are able to predict that learners will successfully complete the Milestone without complications, again ensuring reporting compliance.

Table 13: Comparing Selected and Completed Milestones

| | All Selected Milestones | | | All Completed Milestones | | |
|----|-----------------------------------|-----|-----|--------------------------------|------|-----|
| | Milestone | # | % | Milestone | # | % |
| 1 | 57 – Begin to manage learning | 765 | 19% | 54 – Log into a user account | 7866 | 12% |
| 2 | 1 – Read an ad and email | 268 | 7% | 55 – Search the Internet | 3672 | 6% |
| 3 | 54 – Log into a user account | 162 | 4% | 57 – Begin to manage learning | 3553 | 5% |
| 4 | 55 – Search the Internet | 137 | 3% | 41– Tell time | 3459 | 5% |
| 5 | 3 – Read product information | 123 | 3% | 1 – Read an ad and email | 2281 | 3% |
| 6 | 22 – Write an email | 119 | 3% | 4 – Read course description | 2134 | 3% |
| 7 | 31 – Create table for course info | 98 | 2% | 37– Compare costs on flyer | 2014 | 3% |
| 8 | 60 – Engage with others | 89 | 2% | 43 – Calculate with time sheet | 1985 | 3% |
| 9 | 7 – Read textbook section | 86 | 2% | 7 – Read textbook section | 1618 | 2% |
| 10 | 8 – Read product label/symbols | 84 | 2% | 27 – Read course schedule | 1570 | 2% |

Further Examination of the Use Digital Technology Milestones

We were able to further examine the differences between selection and completion rates among various sub-groups when using the three digital technology Milestones. Such a close up analysis of the data meant that the selection numbers are often lower than 10 for various sub-groups, making the findings tentative. However, when looking at the data as a whole we did note some trends between selection and completion rates that indicate digital technology Milestone completion is more challenging for learners with the lowest levels of education and least challenging for learners with the highest levels of education. This is striking considering that assessors can control the content, context and complexity of these Milestones. It could indicate that learners with the lowest levels of education are having trouble with the Milestone testing process overall. However, the differences among learner sub-groups would need to be further investigated using both the digital technology Milestones and the other Milestones most commonly selected and completed.

Selection rates for learners with the least amount of education are consistently higher than completion rates (i.e. high selection/low completion). Learners with the lowest levels of education (i.e. Grades 0-8, Grade 9) have consistently higher selection rates compared to completion for all three digital technology Milestones. For those with a Grade 10 level of education, selection and completion rates were similar for MS 54 and MS 55 but completion rates dropped by half for the most difficult of the three digital technology Milestones. Then, the trend reverses and we start to see lower selection rates and higher completion rates (i.e. low selection/high completion). Learners with a Grade 11 education have higher completion rates for MS 54 and MS 55 but the rate dropped slightly for MS 56. For learners with a Grade 12 education, the rates of completion were consistently higher than selection. And if a learner had more than a Grade 12 education, the rates of completion were higher than selection.

Table 14: Comparing the Selection and Completion of Use Digital Technology Milestones by Education Level

| | Milestone 54 | | | | Milestone 55 | | | | Milestone 56 | | | |
|---------------------------|--------------|-----|-----------|------|--------------|------|-----------|------|--------------|------|-----------|-----|
| | Selected | | Completed | | Selected | | Completed | | Selected | | Completed | |
| Grade 0-8 | 54 | 33% | 1082 | 14% | 32 | 23% | 339 | 9% | 4 | 10% | 66 | 5% |
| Grade 9 | 22 | 14% | 674 | 9% | 15 | 11% | 272 | 7% | 4 | 10% | 76 | 6% |
| Grade 10 | 20 | 12% | 1009 | 13% | 16 | 12% | 467 | 13% | 8 | 20% | 110 | 9% |
| Grade 11 | 12 | 7% | 858 | 11% | 11 | 8% | 369 | 10% | 6 | 14% | 127 | 10% |
| Grade 12 | 18 | 11% | 2243 | 29% | 31 | 23% | 1175 | 32% | 5 | 12% | 415 | 33% |
| More than Grade 12 | 36 | 22% | 2000 | 25% | 32 | 23% | 1050 | 29% | 14 | 34% | 450 | 36% |
| TOTAL | 162 | 99% | 7866 | 101% | 137 | 100% | 3672 | 100% | 41 | 100% | 1244 | 99% |

Furthermore, there is also a trend showing steadily increasing completion rates aligned with steadily increasing education levels. The most difficult digital technology Milestone (56) is completed only 5% of the time by learners with Grade 0-8 education, but it is completed 36% of the time by learners with more than a Grade 12 education. This Milestone also has completion rates increasing in a fairly consistent way as education levels increase. Similarly, MS 55 is completed only 9% of the time by learners with Grade 0-8 education, but it is completed 32% of the time by learners with a Grade 12 and 29% of the time by learners with a Grade 11 education. MS 54 breaks this trend, showing more learners with higher levels of education completing the Milestone compared to learners with the lowest levels of education. This trend indi-

cates that the most accessible Milestone is being used by assessors working with learners with more educational resources simply to fulfil reporting requirements, as it is not aligned with the capabilities of those learners.

We also compared selection and completion rates by sector. Rates of completion of the digital technology Milestones in the college sector are consistently higher than selection rates the three digital technology Milestones. Rates of completion for learners in community-based programs are consistently lower than selection rates for all three digital technology Milestones. School board selection and completion rates do not have a consistent trend. The rates are aligned for MS 54. School boards show high selection/low completion for MS 55 and low selection/high completion for MS 56.

Table 15: Comparing the Selection and Completion of Use Digital Technology Milestones by Sector

| | Milestone 54 | | | | Milestone 55 | | | | Milestone 56 | | | |
|------------------------|--------------|------|-----------|------|--------------|------|-----------|------|--------------|------|-----------|------|
| | Selected | | Completed | | Selected | | Completed | | Selected | | Completed | |
| Community-based | 84 | 52% | 2816 | 36% | 72 | 52% | 1291 | 35% | 23 | 56% | 407 | 33% |
| College | 41 | 25% | 3327 | 42% | 9 | 7% | 1282 | 35% | 13 | 32% | 434 | 35% |
| School board | 37 | 23% | 1723 | 22% | 56 | 41% | 1099 | 30% | 5 | 12% | 403 | 32% |
| TOTAL | 162 | 100% | 7866 | 100% | 137 | 100% | 3672 | 100% | 41 | 100% | 1244 | 100% |

These trends in selection and completion rate differences related to education attainment and sectors indicate that those students with greater educational resources found in college programs are consistently aligned with lower selection and higher completion rates, compared to students with fewer educational resources, and learners in community-based programs.

The analysis of the digital technology Milestones needs to be repeated with the other commonly used Milestones. Consistent trends in selection and completion rate differences demonstrate the inequitable impacts of the Milestone scheme and indicate that the assessment is not fair, as it is more challenging for learners with the least educational resources to complete and is being used simply to fulfill reporting requirements. This analysis demonstrates that the data related to the most commonly used Milestones in the accountability scheme are unreliable and should not be used to make program comparisons and judgments about program performance.

Summary

- The data demonstrate that one-fifth of assessors rely on digital technology Milestones to ensure the reporting target is met
- The most commonly selected Milestone is MS 57, but the Milestone is completed at only one-quarter of the rate that it is selected
- Overall, assessors limit their Milestone selections. Four Milestones, comprising only 7% of the total number of Milestones, are selected one third (33%) of the time, and slightly less frequently (30%) by assessors in Francophone programs
- A mere 1.6 Milestones were used for each learner in the LBS system in 2013-2014; it is apparent that the Milestones are primarily being used across the LBS system to meet the provincial reporting target
- Trends in selection and completion rate differences related to education attainment and sectors indicate that those students with greater educational resources found in college programs are consistently aligned with lower selection and higher completion rates, compared to students with fewer educational resources, and learners in community-based programs
- Consistent trends in selection and completion rate differences demonstrate the inequitable impacts of the Milestone scheme and indicate that the assessment is not fair, as it is more challenging for learners with the least educational resources to complete
- The most accessible Milestone is being used by assessors working with learners with more educational resources simply to fulfill reporting requirements, as it is not aligned with the capabilities of those learners

The data related to the most commonly used Milestones in the accountability scheme are unreliable and should not be used to make program comparisons and judgments about program performance.

Part 5: Milestone Selection Strategies

In this section of the report we describe five strategies based on a combination of findings from EOIS-CaMS data, interview data and survey data. Programs have developed strategies primarily to minimize the impact of the OALCF and ensure Milestone reporting compliance. But one of the five strategies, implemented in a community-based program, indicates that the Milestones are also being used to make a pedagogical connection to the OALCF and to inform program planning. Contradictory to the guidelines, survey data and interview data indicate that learners *are not* usually directly involved in Milestone selection processes. At least half of the survey respondents indicated they don't usually involve learners in Milestone selection. This section explores this finding in detail as the five main strategies that this study uncovered are discussed in detail. While these strategies may or may not involve learners, our data shows that many programs developed curriculum including preselected Milestones that do not require learner input in their selection.

Each strategy demonstrates some of the challenges, contradictions and inequities inherent in the Milestones and the OALCF. They also reveal how particular strategies are devised in response to inequitably distributed program resources, learner education levels and challenges (also inequitably distributed) and program delivery structures.

The five selection strategies are

1. Reliance on digital technology Milestones to ensure a Milestone is completed
2. Reliance on Milestone 57 to ensure a Milestone is in progress and/or completed
3. Fitting Milestones into current curricular and program structure
4. Fitting Milestones into courses
5. Developing curriculum around a Milestone

There may other selection strategies in use, but these are the ones articulated by study participants. Data from EOIS-CaMS corroborates the first two strategies, indicating that they are widely used.

Selection Strategy 1: Reliance on Use Digital Technology Milestones

Based on EOIS-CaMS data, the most commonly completed Milestone by far is Milestone 54, one of three digital technology Milestones. It was completed at twice the rate of the second most commonly completed Milestone, which is also a digital technology Milestone. Together, the two Milestones made-up nearly one-fifth of all completed Milestones in 2013-2014. It is apparent they have maintained their initial popu-

larity two years after the introduction of the OALCF. This is striking since assessors have had time to review and fully consider the use of additional Milestones but choose to continue to rely on the digital technology Milestones to meet reporting targets.

According to survey and interview data, there are many reasons assessors rely on these Milestones. The following uses and qualities were described by respondents:

- Digital technology Milestones ensure there is a reportable Milestone in EOIS-CaMS
- They are appealing to learners, easy to use, and predictable
- They can be adapted to ensure the use of truly authentic and skill appropriate texts and activities, particularly for learners with limited literacy skills, knowledge and strategies
- They align with actual activities that the learner is engaged in, and learners immediately recognize the texts used for testing purposes
- They can be used in blended learning programs and computer courses
- They introduce learners to the Milestone testing scheme and concept of competencies.

Participants in an interview explained that they use digital technology Milestones mainly to ensure a Milestone is completed so a learner is countable in the EOIS-CaMS system. They spend substantial time registering the students and fulfilling intake requirements, and want to ensure that their time and effort is accounted for in the system. Milestone 54 provides a “security blanket” should the learner leave quickly or prematurely. Furthermore, explained participants, it is ideal for this purpose since it can be administered quickly. One of the participants explained:

For us it is important that every learner has the opportunity to pass a Milestone task because we know that it becomes a measure for the ministry, and we have to meet this requirement. When creating a learning plan we always look at the goals of the learners and try to choose a Milestone in line with their goals, but there is also the thought in the back of our mind that a learner may leave before having had the chance to successfully complete a Milestone and that would be a bad statistic for our program. We use Milestone 54 because we know it is a task that can be measured fairly quickly or may also be an easier task for learners with higher skills to complete. We want to build on success and make learners more comfortable with text they can do and then gradually introduce more complicated texts.

When using Milestone 54, learners can also demonstrate their knowledge using actual and previously used accounts and online text. In this way, it is truly an authentic task compared to other Milestones, explained a participant, most of which are too generalized to reflect the context of LBS clients in realistic ways. A survey respondent made the following related comment: “When assessing with Milestones, it is the Digital Tech Milestones that students most easily relate to.”

The digital technology Milestones are also related to job search activities, an activity that many learners are engaged in, added an interview participant. A survey respondent stated: “I believe digital technology Milestones more directly relate to future learning and the use of skills in daily life.”

An interview participant elaborated this point:

Milestone 54 is very important because I have many people who are looking for jobs and they do not want to use their personal email to send and receive CVs - they do not even know how to send CVs so I make them open an email account, but it's been years since they have done that and they may not remember the password. That's why Milestone 54 is very relevant in the learning plan and very useful as a first step in the job search. Milestone 55 is also useful for job search but the link with employment is not quite accurate.

A survey respondent acknowledged that Milestones 54 and 55 serve an important role in fulfilling reporting requirements, but appears conflicted about using them only for this purpose.

It would be a simple thing to get every learner to do a quick and dirty #54 or #5, but we have taken the high road on this and don't want to make learners do unnecessary milestones. The challenge is we lose a large number of learners who have not attained a milestone.

An assessor in a community-based program pointed out that digital technology Milestones are used often because the reading and writing/typing skills involved can be adapted to fit the literacy and digital skills, knowledge, strategies and insights that the learner has. These adaptations ensure that the assessment is fair. However, adaptations also mean that information about progress and program activity is not comparable since such a wide range of digital text can be used.

Another assessor described how they use the digital technology Milestones as part of their blended learning delivery model. The digital technology Milestones are administered through Skype or WebEx immediately after program orientation to ensure each learner has a completed Milestone at the beginning of the program. Completing the Milestone also helps learners build their test-taking confidence and learn the testing format, explained the assessor.

However, the digital technology Milestones in their current form are limited in their ability to be representative of learner progress and program accomplishments. The assessor explained they need to be augmented and better contextualized to reflect a variety of digital environments and literacy processes. They need to include networking/sharing aspects and they need to be integrated with other competencies and task groups. A survey respondent aptly described the need:

Digital milestones are important, but need to be vastly overhauled in order to be useful. I use them extensively, as I primarily teach computing courses. Many of our students identify digital literacy as their main barrier to independence or employment.

A couple of survey respondents said they need to be better representative of the range of digital skills, knowledge and strategies taught in programs, particularly those related to the use of office suites. Furthermore, both interview participants and survey respondents noted that the three Milestones do not work well together to indicate progress, as there is a substantial difference in complexity between 54 and 55, and between 55 and 56.

Completing a digital technology Milestone provides assessors with some useful information. In the survey, at least half of respondents indicated that digital technology Milestones completion tells them that learners will be able to do the same activity (e.g., log into a user account) at the same level of difficulty in their daily lives (65%); and learners have acquired particular digital technology skills and knowledge (52%). However, respondents did not indicate that the digital technology Milestones provide information about the learners' skills and knowledge related to their goals and transition readiness.

In comparison, when asked about the information that Milestones in general provide, no choice received a 50% agreement, indicating ambivalence about other Milestone results. The majority (60%) of follow-up comments related to this question were focused on describing the various limitations and challenges associated with making an appropriate Milestone selection. The comments were synthesized:

- Milestones are too difficult for some and too easy for others
- Milestones are disconnected from learner goals and program purposes
- Milestones cannot provide useful information about progress
- Milestones are not meaningful and relevant to for learners.

These limitations and challenges will be explored in detail after describing four additional selection strategies.

Selection Strategy 2: Reliance on Milestone 57

Assessors also rely on Milestone 57, Begin to manage learning, to open a learner plan. It was selected on 19% of learner plans. Assessors said they are under pressure to open a learner plan and select a Milestone to comply with reporting targets. One survey respondent stated simply: “In CaMS, no Milestone means nothing happened.”

Another respondent described the pressure to ensure each plan has a completed Milestone.

All of our learners tend to be flighty and are always "about to exit", so the need to select a Milestone early on is felt in order that all of our work (intake, data entry, initial assessments, learning plan creation, one-on-one instruction) will be credited in the stats.

A community-based assessor explained that she uses Milestone 57 for nearly all of the learner plans because it allows her to open a file in EOIS-CaMS. In addition, she uses the Milestone as a form of assessment, as it “sets the bar” for participation in the program. If learners aren’t able to complete the Milestone, she explained, then subsequent program activities will be challenging for them. Her comments indicate that she is using the Milestone as a readiness indicator for all other learning in the program. She also said that Milestone 57 takes about one month for learners to complete, indicating that learners need substantial time in order to understand the content and aims of the Milestone, and then develop their responses.

During this time, learners are not working on activities that are directly related to their goals and reasons for being in the program. A similar delay is also experienced by learners who are undergoing lengthy intake and assessment processes, as in the examples of the program assessor who followed a 20 item intake protocol, and the assessor who stated that the intake process takes about 12 hours. Including Milestone administration as part of intake is an additional barrier to program participation for those learners who need time to learn the content, format and expected responses in order to successfully complete the Milestone.

However, Milestone 57 is completed on only 5% of learner plans. The stark difference between selection and completion rates indicates that assessors are likely using the Milestone under pressure to comply with their understanding of reporting requirements, and open a learner plan in the EOIS-CaMS system. It is not known what is happening between selection and completion. Learners could be attempting the Milestone but failing to complete it, and this is then reported. Or perhaps learners are not completing the Milestone, it is not reported, and then the selection is changed. Or perhaps assessors realize the Milestone will be too difficult and will take too much time to prepare learners to complete, they then change the Milestone in the database, and then complete a different one.

Selection Strategy 3: Fitting Milestones into Current Curricular and Program Structures

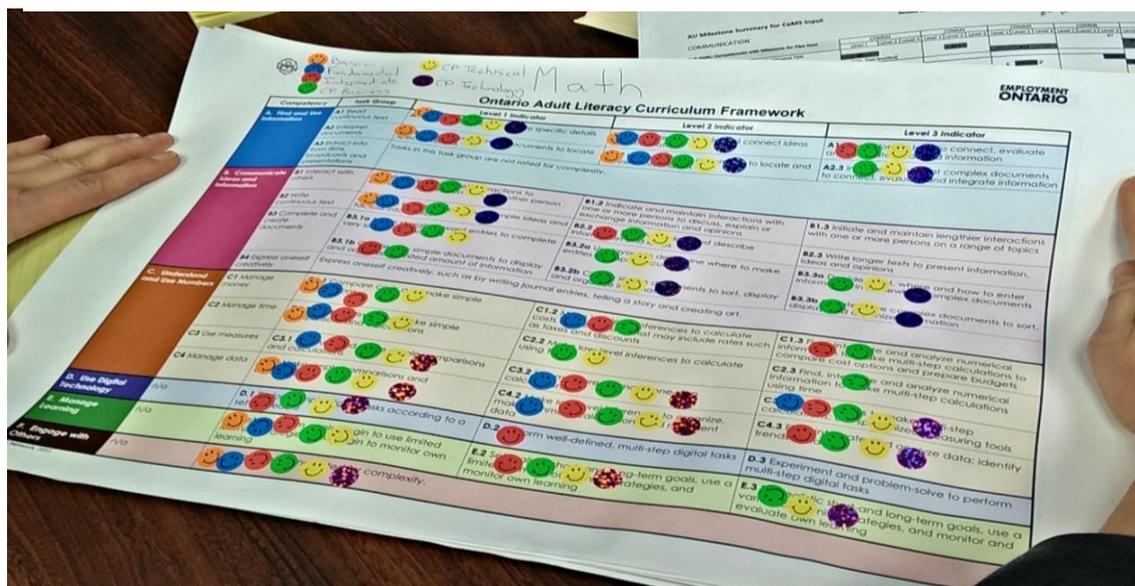
A college program coordinator described the development and implementation of an extensive process that was used to establish a Milestone protocol in a program with 700 students per year. The college coordinator and instructors met together to develop the protocol when the OALCF was first introduced. The coordinator said they were guided by the following question: “How does what we do fit with OALCF?” In particular, the fit was being made with the Milestones. In other words, they had to find a way to comply with reporting requirements, while still maintaining the integrity of their current curricular structure and program organization.

We came in with our curriculum ready made and simply pulled out pieces of the OALCF that matched. Others were not able to do this. Instead, they are asking ‘How can I take these Milestones and teach to them?’ They think that this is their curriculum.

The college uses the ACE curriculum, a secondary equivalency curriculum, to prepare students to enter postsecondary programs. Students are registered in classes and work semi-independently on a set of curricular materials under the guidance of an instructor.

As a first step, instructors met together in subject-matter groups (e.g., communications, math, technology) to review and analyse the OALCF Curriculum Framework. They wanted to determine the connections between the OALCF competencies and task groups and their curriculum. To facilitate the discussions, they applied colour-coded stickers to a laminated chart of the OALCF competencies and the task groups (as illustrated in Figure 8). They also consulted the OALCF Curriculum Framework document.

Figure 8: Colour-coded Stickers Applied to OALCF Chart



In the example illustrated for math, the stickers representing levels of difficulty in the college curriculum and class structure were applied to the OALCF chart to indicate a correspondence between the OALCF indicators and the topics in their postsecondary preparation math curriculum. This is primarily an exercise in making a semantic connection between the topics in the two curricular systems, and is not a deeper analysis involving connections between concepts, knowledge, strategies and particular computational skills. This is why we see math related stickers in all the competencies, not just numeracy competencies. It is also why we see all levels of math in the college system corresponding across the all three levels of the OALCF. In other words a correspondence between Grade 12 equivalent mathematics (yellow, green and shiny purple stickers) is made with Levels 1-3 numeracy in the OALCF for two task groups. Their approach demonstrates how the OALCF indicators are too general and vague on their own to be pedagogically meaningful. This means they can be readily lifted out of the context of the OALCF and used in a completely different system.

The next stage of development involved a refinement of the original sticker placement in order to make an alignment between the OALCF levels and the college program levels. “It didn’t make sense to have a Level 1 Milestone in Comm. 6,” explained the coordinator. The program also had to focus on Milestones in the Postsecondary pathway since that was the goal of 95% of students in the program. “Everyone identified everything, and then we went through and picked out the particular ones that we would use.” A final consideration was ensuring that students completed a Milestone within a 60 day period to prevent a student from being “inactive” within the EOIS-CaMS system. They also attempted to make the Milestone fit with course content “rather than just flinging a Milestone at them” explained the coordinator.

Figure 9: Data Entry Overview

| | | Level 1 | Level 2 | Level 3 | Level 1 | Level 2 | Level 3 | Level 1 | Level 2 | Level 3 |
|--|---|-------------|---------|-------------|----------|-------------------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Competency A Find and Use Information | A1 Read Continuous Text | | | | | | | | | |
| | A2 Interpret Documents | #9 | | | #11 | | | | | |
| | A3 Extract Info from Films, Broad. and other Pres. (not levelled) | | | | | | | #14 | | |
| Competency B Communicate Ideas and Information | B1 Interact with Others | | | | | | | | | |
| | B2 Write Continuous Text | #18 | | | #18, #19 | | | E | #22/23 | P |
| | B3 Complete and Create Documents | | | | | | | | | |
| | B4 Express Oneself Creatively | | | | | | | | | |
| Milestone | | #9 | | #11 | | #14 | | | | |
| Goal Path | | SP | | EASPI | | EASPI | | | | |
| Approach | | Extra | | Extra | | New notetaking; mark for OALC | | | | |
| Point to deliver | | Week 6 | | Week 6 | | C5.3 | | | | |
| Administer | | Test Centre | | Test Centre | | In class | | | | |
| Milestone | | #18 | | | | #22/#23 | | | | |
| Goal Path | | EA | | | | E/ASP | | | | |
| Approach | | Extra | | | | Extra | | | | |
| Point to deliver | | Week 8-10 | | | | Week 8-10 | | | | |
| Administer | | Test Centre | | | | Test Centre | | | | |

Once the instructors had an overview of which Milestone was to be administered in which college preparation course at a particular point in the course, the final stage focused on ensuring efficient and error free reporting. A small team of support staff do the data entry in EOIS-CaMS. “Administratively, it’s been huge,” said the coordinator. The college program had to create one extra full-time position within their existing budget. To facilitate data entry, the coordinator developed an overview for the support staff that sits on their keyboards. It was developed “because the office was panicking” about students who were registered without knowing what items to open in the system for each student. The final overview is oriented to reporting and not curriculum and learning. “OALCF and CAMS doesn’t care about which course. They only care about competencies, task groups and levels.” The coordinator explained that as soon as a student is registered in one of their courses, the data entry staff refer to the overview (see Figure 9). For example, if a student is registered in Communications 3, the staff person opens up A2 at Level 1 and B2 at Level 1. The staff also knows that MS 9 is attached to A2 and Milestone 18 is attached to B2, when the Milestone is administered in the course and how it is administered.

From the learners’ perspective, they see an activity marked in their course packages that indicates they must complete a Milestone at that point. Sometimes the Milestone is administered in the program’s test centre and sometimes it is completed in the class.

Interviewer: What does it tell you when they complete Milestones?

Coordinator: Um, well...because our curriculum already had clear markers to say this is what you have when you come in, this is what you need when you leave, and we’ve identified what progress you’ve made in between, for me it doesn’t mean very much.

Selection Strategy 4: Fitting Milestones into Courses

A similar strategy as the program-wide curriculum alignment is to align the Milestones with one particular course in an attempt to make them meaningful and meet reporting requirements. One survey respondent described the process used:

We match the milestones to the courses, and not to the individual students. We found that this is the only way to manage the Milestones. The administering and recording of the milestones is extremely time consuming, and it’s hard to get student buy-in.

A college assessor in the same program that developed the program-wide strategy explained how she adapted the strategy for a course she recently designed. She integrated seven Milestones into a course designed to run over a 16 week period. The Milestones, including all three digital technology Milestones are

completely embedded in the learning activities. Students “don’t realize they are different” from other activities. The course is not part of the regular college curriculum, but is focused on the use of computers and employment readiness. It is offered to adults accessing employment services.

She based the integration on course topics and activities so the students are completing a Milestone that has a relationship to the learning content. This was straightforward when integrating the digital technology Milestones because she could use content that matched the course. However, she couldn’t simply give the Milestone to the learner, even if they were using familiar content, because the Milestone must be administered in a formal testing situation. To ensure the students could complete the Milestone, she developed a set of activities that are designed to mimic each Milestone that the students use for practice and preparation. This is done she explained “get them into that thinking mode.”

She also uses Milestones 57 and 58 in a similar way. Milestone 57 serves as a practice Milestone, which students do in class together before attempting Milestone 58, which is completed independently. The assessor acknowledged that she wasn’t following the Milestone guidelines, but made this decision to ensure that the work was meaningful and useful to the students.

I don’t do anything unless it’s meaningful. I really studied the Milestones to how they would fit and what would work best. I am bending the guideline rule, but if I give them the sheet that they did, I haven’t marked on it.

Although this assessor has analysed the Milestones, participated in extensive discussions with other colleagues (when developing the program-wide strategy), and established an extensive process to integrate them into a course, she does not use them to gather pedagogical information about student progress and accomplishments.

The Milestones are not what I’m assessing. They’re not my assessment tool. They are my marker so that I know that the learner has achieved that. That they can complete that amount of learning. So that I know when the student completes this [Milestone 30] I know that they’ve done time management analysis.

Figure 10: Milestones Embedded in a Course

| ID | Competency, Task Group, Level | Start Class # | End Class # | Duration | Class Number (2 classes @ 3 hours per week) | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|----|--|---------------|-------------|----------|---|---|---|----|---|---|----|---|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| | | | | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 | 15 | 16 |
| 1 | D: Use Digital Technology Level 1 | 1 | 4 | 2 wks | | | | 54 | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 2 | A: Find and Use Information 1: Read Continuous Text Level 3 | 1 | 7 | 3.5 wks | | | | | | 6 | | | | | | | | | | |
| 3 | E: Manage Learning Level 1 | 1 | 8 | 4 wks | | | | | | | 57 | | | | | | | | | |
| 4 | D: Use Digital Technology Level 2 | 5 | 10 | 3 wks | | | | | | | | | 55 | | | | | | | |
| 5 | B: Communicate Ideas and Information 3: Complete and Create Documents Level 2b | 7 | 12 | 3 wks | | | | | | | | | | 30 | | | | | | |
| 6 | E: Manage Learning Level 2 | 9 | 16 | 4 wks | | | | | | | | | | | | | 58 | | | |
| 7 | D: Use Digital Technology Level 3 | 11 | 16 | 3 wks | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 56 | | |
| 8 | Learning related to communications for employment | 1 | 16 | 8 wks | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |

Selection Strategy 5: Developing Curriculum around a Milestone

An interview participant working in a community-based program described her individualized planning process that involves integrating the OALCF competencies, task groups and Milestones with previously used curricular materials for each learner. Her strategy was described in relation to a learner’s goal to improve his math skills and knowledge in order to do some personal budgeting. In comparison to the college program she had to do far more work on her own, involving substantial changes to her previous curriculum.

Figure 11: Referring to the Learning Activities Checklist for a Student’s Math Goal



She is familiar enough with the OALCF that she automatically made a connection between the learner’s budgeting goal and the OALCF competency Understand and Use Numbers, and task group Manage Money. The particular topic of budgeting, the learner’s actual goal, is not addressed in the OALCF. Next to her computer is a poster (the same poster used in the college program-wide selection process) that contains a brief overview of the OALCF Curriculum Framework. She also consults the listing of Milestones that accompany each competency and task group. The learner will work at Level 1 and there is only one Milestone at this level for this task groups: MS 37–Refer to flyers and price lists to make simple comparisons and calculations. She then consults the list of skills in the ESKARGO resource. The ESKARGO listing is extensive, containing 46 skills under five categories. She then copies and compiles worksheets from various math workbooks and resources that address the skills listed in the ESKARGO resource. She didn’t mention using resources that address personal budgeting. The Milestone is administered only after the learner has completed the worksheets. She explained: “If they don’t have all this building readiness stuff, then you have to go back and teach that. You can’t do a Milestone because you haven’t taught them this stuff.” It appears that the Milestone, unrelated to personal budgeting, coordinates her planning. Then, rather than refer to resources to build budgeting skills, knowledge, strategies and insights, she refers to lists of decontextualized skills in the ESKARGO resource. Such an approach with a focus building decontextualized skills to prepare to do a Milestone could undermine efforts needed to help the learner meet his actual goal.

The OALCF curriculum framework, the Milestones and related ESKARGO resource are used together to organize her planning process. They also guide the way that she looks at literacy and numeracy development. “In order for this person to get out of Understand and use Numbers Level, 1 in order to get here to go over here [from one level to the next], what do I need to teach them?” The assessor also did extensive work to align her curricular materials with the OALCF. To do this work she created a master chart with the following categories, similar to the one below. She explained: “I already had curriculum done up. I have to line up my curriculum with this.”

Table 16: Master Planning Chart

| Competency | Task Group | Sample Tasks | Existing Curricular Materials and Workbooks | Milestones |
|------------|------------|--------------|---|------------|
| | | | | |
| | | | | |

She refers to this master document when planning for each learner. The sample tasks are used to help learners prepare to take the Milestone. She also uses a task activity template produced through a support

organization. She creates practice tasks that are more challenging than the Milestones in order to ensure that learners can do a Milestone. She explained that this is done in order to “get them into the thinking.” The need for practice tasks demonstrate that the Milestones are distinct from other learning activities and must be learned separately from these activities.

The organization of the table used for planning is striking, particularly when comparing this approach with the one used in the college program. In this planning process, the OALCF is wrapped around existing curricular materials. Situating the existing curriculum between key elements from the OALCF indicates that they are modified and adapted to fit the OALCF. Whereas the college program maintained the integrity of their existing curriculum and focused on finding ways to modify the Milestone process in order to make them fit. They become merely an afterthought rather than a focus in planning. In addition, college instructors don’t use the OALCF competencies and task groups. They are simply categories used for administrative purposes. The two strategies help to demonstrate how the OALCF has inequitable impacts across programs.

Summary

The five strategies reveal a series of challenges, contradictions and inequities between the stated purpose and administration of the Milestones and their actual implementation and integration into programs. Since the Milestones mandated and disconnected from program learning, learners’ goals and experiences, they present a barrier that must be addressed. Programs respond by devising carefully considered strategies that are shaped by their program resources, delivery format, existing curricular supports and learners.

Their responses often contradict Milestone guidelines devised to standardize administration and provide “objective” and “reliable” data. The administration of the Milestone is the only aspect that is intended to be standardized. The validity and reliability of the Milestones are not standardized. This means that their integrity as a standardized tool is highly questionable. Furthermore, the most commonly used Milestones do not even have standardized content since the assessor is free to choose the online environment and accompanying text to be read. This eliminates the possibility of obtaining consistent and comparable results with the digital technology Milestones, which in turn directly impacts the integrity of any measures used in the Performance Management Framework (PMF).

Furthermore, the aim of comparable results may not be possible in a system that was inequitable resourced before the OALCF and is experiencing additional inequities with the OALCF. These include resources related to finances, curricular development, staff expertise, qualifications and training, union support to name a few that colleges and school boards can draw on. More importantly, the data indicates that community-based programs work to serve the least educated and doing so with the least resources. The

extensive work done by a college to fit the Milestones into their current curricular structure with the least disruption and impact on pedagogical and administrative activities raises some very important issues about the inequitable impacts of the OALCF, and inequitable program resources that can be accessed to address the OALCF. In addition to the advantage of being a large program, the college also has other advantages: they work with learners with the most educational resources; they focus almost exclusively on one goal path and they did not have to do additional work to alter their existing curriculum and accommodate the OALCF. Overall, instructors and learners spend minimal time on accountability related activities that serve little to no pedagogical purpose.

In comparison, a small community-based program with one staff person who is the coordinator, assessor and instructor who develops individualised plans for each learner encounters far more challenges and has to devote her already limited instructional time and resources to the Milestones. Although her approach is more aligned with the guidelines, it may also be more confusing for the learner, since it is challenging to find a Milestone that matches a learner's goal. The approach is also far more time-consuming for her as the instructor. The approach could also undermine her attempts to develop a program that meets learners' goals and support the development of skills, knowledge, strategies and insights that they need to respond to goal-related literacy demands.

Part 6: Milestone Challenges and Contradictions

This study builds on many of the findings related to Milestone challenges described in three previous reviews. The findings in this study provide additional details that help explain *why* the Milestones are difficult, disconnected from learner goals and program purposes, unable to provide useful information about progress, lack meaning and relevance for learners, and are confusing to administer. In this section, these challenges and contradictions will be examined in relation to the document analysis findings, in order to point out the developmental and design limitations and assumptions that underpin the many confusions and contradictions described by study participants. Exacerbating design limitations are reporting requirements and administration guidelines that add to the challenges and contradictions experienced.

Most of the challenges described, do not include the digital technology Milestones. Issues related to difficulty, disconnection from learner goals and program purposes, lack of meaning and relevance for learners and administration are not associated with these Milestones since assessors can choose their content, context and complexity. In addition, the digital technology Milestones are not assessed in the same way as most other Milestones using a series of follow-up questions. However, the digital technology Milestones, similar to other Milestones, are limited in their ability to provide useful information about progress.

Difficulty of the Milestones

Comments made by survey respondents indicate that most Milestones are too difficult for the learners that they work with. One wrote the following:

Even the most basic Milestones in all the categories are too advanced for the vast majority of our learners to complete successfully. This applies even to learners who have been working with us for years.

Another said that “none of the learners in this program have successfully completed any but the easiest milestones.”

During an interview, an assessor explained that Level 1 is simply too vast for learners who are developing their literacy, and have limited literacy resources (i.e. a comprehensive and frequently used set of skills, knowledge, strategies and insights) and repertoires (i.e. an array of text-based experiences in various settings).

Another assessor, working in a community-based program, described what can happen when learners with the most limited literacy resources register in the program. One learner needed two years of work and learning before he was ready to complete a Milestone. The learner was “taken off the books” so the program didn’t show a learner plan without a completed Milestone. However, the program’s Employment

Training Consultant (ETC) urged the assessor to put the learner's information back into the system in order to demonstrate that some clients could take years to complete a Milestone. This particular request put the assessor in a vulnerable position, as she was unsure if the program would be judged negatively. The assessor is also reluctant to select too many Milestones for learner plans and develop a more comprehensive learning plan. She explained that the program doesn't want to risk showing Milestones in the system that learners may not complete. However, the ETC was urging her to develop more comprehensive plans.

An interview participant from a school board program described how they "offset" learners who need more time to complete a Milestone in their program. They have focused on developing short-term computer related activities and courses for those with employment goals. They then use the digital technology Milestones to report progress. Those who take longer are learners with academic goals often in the secondary credit bridging program. "We're bringing in people who can show progress more efficiently," said the coordinator. Her colleague emphasized the change was instituted as a direct result of the Milestone reporting: "Learners have to be able to complete a Milestone. We're just bringing in anyone who meets this criteria for learning." She didn't say that they had turned away those who weren't able to complete a Milestone.

A college assessor felt that LBS was no longer a program for what she called an emergent reader: "Emergent readers...I don't think they're LBS ready in my view." While participating in a regional training event, the following advice about working with adults with limited literacy resources was given to all participants: "Take them into your program if you wish but find an alternate source of funding." She then added that she had pursued different funding sources for certain learners. She received this directive at a OALCF training session but didn't indicate who made the statement.

A stated aim of LBS is to "provide literacy services to those most in need of them" and "provide high quality instruction and services to adults who lack the literacy and basic skills they need to achieve goals"⁵², yet the OALCF Milestones are leading some to question this mandate. This fundamental contradiction raises questions about whether LBS remains accessible to adult non-readers and those with the least educational resources.

The OALCF, the Milestones and related international survey spin-off tests work against the LBS objective to provide educational programs to those most in need. The international literacy survey framework used to develop the Milestones was not designed to recognize the abilities of adults who have less than 8-

⁵² Ministry of Training Colleges and Universities (2014). *LBS Service Provider Guidelines*. Available http://www.tcu.gov.on.ca/eng/eopg/publications/lbs_2014_2015_service_provider_guidelines_sdb_approved.pdf

10 years of formal education. Half (49%) of all learners in programs have less than a high school education, and 14% have only 0-8 years of education. The decision to attempt to make a connection to the international literacy survey results and transpose some of its test development methods into the OALCF was a fundamental mis-step. The test tasks produced are simply too difficult for many, and the adaptations that were made to the OALCF and Milestones have led to the creation of a unique curricular system that defeats the aim of making alignments between LBS and international literacy survey results.

Unfamiliar Content, Instructions and Terminology

In addition, the Milestone itself adds a layer of difficulty, not just for emergent readers. While learners may have the skills, knowledge and strategies required to complete the Milestone, the formality of the process, instructions, wording of the test questions and unfamiliar content could prevent the learner from successfully completing the assessment.

One assessor said the Milestones use “convoluted questions” and often contain confusing instructions. Another commented on the test tasks themselves that often present unfamiliar language and context. For example, she explained, referring to a particular Milestone, many learners have never made an international call and are not likely to ever do so, and don’t understand what it means. Another assessor, provided a different example and said, “In many rural communities there is no public transport system but there are hockey schedules.” The first assessor said she would like a glossary for the Milestones so she could review terms that learners don’t know before attempting the test.

An assessor in another community-based program described how her program did develop a glossary for learners to use during the Milestone administration. She also works with students to develop their Milestone specific vocabulary so that they can understand Milestone instructions. The vocabulary commonly used in Milestones is embedded in various teaching and learning activities. The learner can bring a glossary of Milestone vocabulary to the test session. In addition, the program she works in developed a course that prepares students to complete a Milestone.

Another interview participant noted that a learner could possibly complete a Milestone task, in her example it was numeracy, but the instructions made it too difficult to complete. It’s the directions that cause confusion, she explained. “Often the instructions in Milestone tasks are very complex and can cause confusion among learners. Often it is because of the unknown vocabulary.”

Also causing difficulty are font sizes, explained a participant who then emphasized a need for assessors and programs to have more control over content, context and complexity. “Flexibility in relation to changing the content and presentation of Milestone tasks would allow us to use Milestones that reflects the reality of our clients.”

Recently developed “assisted Milestones” were not mentioned as an alternative that could be used to address issues related to difficulty and understanding the content and instructions. Furthermore, an interview participant said the assisted Milestones are more complicated to administer and aren’t being used. Another participant suggested that the Milestones need to be drastically changed in order to be more useful.

When assessors discussed difficulties related to the instructions, and what one described as convoluted questions, some of these challenges could be related to the wording of the follow-up test questions and the use of the information-processing model, which is distinct from a reading comprehension model used in school-based literacy testing and standardized reading tests. The questions are confusing because they don’t operate in the same way as questions on tests and in a variety of materials that follow a reading comprehension approach.

Difficulties related to the content could be related to the way that the Milestones, following the basic principles used to develop the international literacy survey test tasks, are reconstructed approximations of actual textual formats. This means they do not contain specific contextual cues such as logos and recognizable names and places. In addition, in order to read the information and respond to the test questions, a learner cannot rely on previously acquired contextual knowledge. This could result in the need for glossaries, a focus on vocabulary development and Milestone preparation courses. In addition, the content of some Milestones simply doesn’t reflect the realities of learners’ lives.

Skills, Knowledge and Strategies are Unique and Not Transferable

The Milestones constitute their own unique set of skills, content knowledge, reading, writing and numeracy strategies and insights about how literacy works. This means they are not automatically transferable, nor are they representative of actual literacy demands outside the testing situation. This has happened for the following reasons:

- Test tasks are fictionalized approximations of actual documents and texts
- The content and context of test tasks may not be familiar or recognizable to learners
- Test questions use a distinct information-processing approach combined with a 5Ws questioning approach, which does not reflect how someone would respond to the text outside the testing situation
- Learners are not able to draw on their own experience and knowledge to respond to questions.

A survey respondent made the following succinct comment:

Milestones are so narrowly focused that, although they may be successfully completed in the program, those skills may not be transferable to situations outside of the classroom.

An interview participant from a school board program noted that “the problem with a lot of the Milestones, unless you have a person working on those exact skills, they really don’t fit. The Milestones are very limited.”

The Milestones may also be limited when simply judging them in the narrowest way for an ability to show that a learner can complete a Milestone and nothing else. Although one survey respondent stated that the Milestones do help show some form of development or gain, the respondent then provided a contradictory example.

Milestones provide us with no guarantee that learners have the ability to apply the same skills in their world outside of the LBS classroom. I have in fact accidentally used the same Milestone twice, and the learner has not realized it. When I discovered my mistake, I compared the results of each Milestone and discovered that their score was higher the first time it was given than the second time.

Unpredictable Results and Efforts Made to Ensure Completion

Their uniqueness and overall difficulty combine to make it challenging for some assessors to be able to predict whether or not their learners will be able to successfully complete a Milestone. Similar to the survey respondent above, they have experienced contradictory and unexpected results.

An assessor in a community-based program was perplexed by the recent results of two different students. One student was not able to complete a numeracy-related Milestone that had been carefully chosen to be administered following an extensive set of learning activities. The student demonstrated progress by being consistent and completing all assignments. “She started on September 10. You can see her marks on completing the work. Her lowest mark was 80%!”

When asked if the student was nervous about taking a test, the assessor said the following:

I down-play the test part of it. I try not to say that. I got the script, the Milestone script they gave us of how to introduce the Milestone. This is what this is...to monitor your progress...da, da, da. That might have been true. I’m not sure. I’d like to do it again.

She considered that the student may have been nervous. However, she wasn’t able to adequately address the issue because Milestone guidelines state that she can’t review the test with the student, nor can she re-administer the test once any issues of test anxiety have been addressed, unless she waits the required six-week period. Choosing a different Milestone instead does not seem to be a viable option for many assessors as it involves more instructional time and content with no guarantee for the student to succeed.

She mulled over the recent experience during our interview, searching for possible reasons that the student was not able to complete the Milestone.

If they've done all the work in there [point to student's individualized activity binder] and their marks are good, and you give them the Milestone, then they should be able to do that Milestone. But that's not really true because there's still other things in there that's not...I don't think it's written down. I did that. She did not pass. So what am I not doing?

As she shared her experience, she also developed a plan. She decided to have the student repeat the Milestone without waiting the mandatory six weeks. But first, she will create a practice Milestone that mimics the actual one and “prep her for that.”

The same assessor shared a second experience with a different learner who had recently completed a preparation program to write a set of tests that would be used to earn secondary credits. The student went to the secondary credit program, wrote the tests and passed. However, she was not able to complete the Level 1 Milestone selected for her. “The Milestone is not reflective of what she's able to do.” The assessor was unsure how to report what happened in the EOIS-CaMS system.

Do I keep her in there until she passes a Milestone? I don't know. She's done all the work right. According to my records she's done the work, she just didn't pass the Milestone. She's going on to her high school credits. Do you continue giving a Milestone or just say not attained? They say we're not supposed to put it in there if it's not attained.

Her concern with this student is deciding whether or not she should wait the required six week period before re-administering the Milestone. “She's all ready to go. Do I hold her back? No. I wouldn't hold her back. She's done all the work. She just didn't get this one.” In addition, she's not sure how to report the student in the system because she completed all required activities and achieved her goal, but wasn't able to complete the Milestone. Her experience also underscores the disconnection of the literacy skills, knowledge and strategies required to complete the Milestone from day-to-day program learning activities needed to help the learner meet her goal to enter an adult secondary credit program.

An assessor in a community-based program described how she ensures that learners are prepared to complete a Milestone. She is able to do this work because she works with individual learners. She uses task-based activities found online and documents the completion of the activities so she can show that learners are well prepared before attempting a Milestone. In addition, she also said that she used LBS Demonstrations that were developed within the previous assessment system. An interview participant from a Franco-phone program used the same strategy. However, using Demonstrations developed under the previous

LBS outcomes system could be a problem, since they do not use the same test question approach. Their efforts to prepare learners could actually cause more confusions and are yet another barrier that distances a learner from his or her goal.

An assessor working with Deaf students explained that Milestones 15 and 16 are completed in ASL and she relies on the communication Milestones more than the reading related Milestones. However, if a Milestone is not successfully completed, the assessor uses her office hours to review the Milestone with the learner and assign additional work to prepare the learner to re-attempt the Milestone. In addition, the program developed a Milestone preparation course. They also have students do post Milestone assessments to help them retain the skills, knowledge and strategies previously used to complete a Milestone. Their extensive efforts underscore the extent of the disconnection between Milestones and day-to-day teaching and learning.

Another interview participant explained that she doesn't have access to the Milestones since only designated assessors can administer them and not the instructors. The lack of access makes it difficult to choose Milestones for learners since instructors aren't able to judge if the learners are adequately prepared to complete the Milestone. Instructors without access select the same Milestone for all students because they know and can be confident that their learners are prepared to complete them successfully. Another participant who does have access explained that she simply doesn't have the time required to analyse the content of the Milestones, and then judge their appropriateness for specific learners. Another explained that learners are not involved in the selection process because the task is simply too daunting to consider.

I haven't had time to explore all of the Milestones (they are in a massive binder) and what each one involves; it is quite taxing to understand exactly what skills the learner will need for a particular Milestone.

Not only would the instructor have to consider each Milestone but he or she would also need to consider how existing program curricula align with each Milestone. "Our textbooks don't match up with these provincial tests [Milestones] like they do in elementary school."

The ESKARGO resource was designed to address this challenge. However, it may not be an adequate response to the many challenges identified, and could add complexities to planning processes as instructors navigate between a reading comprehension and information-processing approach. In addition, the attempt to supplement the Milestones and OALCF to make them somewhat useable has diverted efforts from the development of a range of supports that have usefulness and applicability when responding to day-to-day literacy demands.

Disconnection from Learner Goals and Program Purposes

The difficulty of the Milestones, unfamiliarity, unique approach, lack of transferability and unpredictability combine to contribute to the disconnection of the Milestones from learner goals and program purposes. Survey respondents made several comments about this overall limitation of the Milestones. Here are a few of their comments:

- o There are only a couple that you can actually use for specific goal paths.*
- o Milestones are rarely applicable and seem like a 'hoop' we have to jump through—useless much of the time in relation to true goals, and even goal path.*
- o Currently, the Milestones are so simplistic and broad that they only serve as an administrative check mark.*
- o I find that the Milestones from one goal path to another is [sic] a bit redundant and only extra work for the practitioner, as only the title and a couple of words changed, and the basic work is the same.*
- o The Milestones often seem like a 'grab-bag' of activities selected because the Ministry ran out of time rather than a thoughtful selection of activities to show the progress of learners through the curriculum framework. The lack of training, development, and their inability to reflect actual learners' goals leave them somewhat problematic. Some are better than others (inconsistency is a big issue). The fact that so many learners have a goal related to getting their license and there is nothing vaguely related to this in the Milestones is quite telling. (Independence milestones are focused on budgeting and reading flyers.)*

Two fundamental problems about the ability of the Milestones to be goal-oriented are being raised. First, there is a difference between what one commentator refers to as “true goals” and goal paths. The five goal paths are a concept created by the LBS system, whereas true goals are the particular literacy learning aims, intentions and purposes learners have. The difference between the abstract concept of goal path and true goals is most apparent in the employment and independence goal paths. The three academic paths are more closely aligned, since they were created around institutional structures and a curriculum (i.e. the Ontario Secondary Curriculum), whether it is formalized, as it is in the postsecondary goal path or less formalized, as it is in the secondary credit goal path. Adults who do not have academic goals are categorized into employment or independence goal paths. They may enter the program with very specific aims such as prepare to write a test to get a drivers' licence or very general aims such as help their children with

their homework. Neither very specific nor general aims are represented in the OALCF Curriculum Framework or the Milestones. For example, an interview participant described a learner who wanted to learn more about his First Nations culture and history. The Milestone chosen for him was MS 1 – Read a classified ad and an email. Neither the content of the Milestone nor the skills, knowledge and strategies required to complete the task are aligned with the learner’s true goal. The Milestone was chosen for administrative and reporting reasons, for one to communicate with clients via email and for another to meet the requirement of one Milestone per Learning Plan.

Also not part of the Milestone design are the academic skills, knowledge, strategies and insights needed to prepare for secondary credit, postsecondary and apprenticeship. Although some Milestones may have a topic that could be related to academic goals, such as read a course description, the underlying literacy skills, strategies, knowledge and insights are not aligned. This is why a commentator found them to be too “simplistic and broad” or why, according to another respondent, they have no alignment with a particular goal path and can easily be substituted so a learner with a postsecondary goal could easily do an employment or independence related Milestone.

Overall, the Milestones appear as a “grab-bag” of activities, one commentator wrote, rather than a “thoughtful selection” of activities. They are an abstract and virtual representation of the LBS system without useful connections to actual learner goals, and without considering actual literacy demands and processes required to pursue those goals.

In addition to the topics, skills, knowledge, strategies, and insights that are disconnected, the overall time commitment required to prepare for a Milestones is a factor. An assessor in a community-based program explained that learners may change their goal from employment to independence or vice-versa, but the assessor does not change the Milestone if the learner is close to completing it, since so much time has been invested to prepare the learner.

Limited and Inconsistent Information about Progress

Milestones do not provide instructors with pedagogically useful information about the learner’s ability to develop literacy skills, knowledge, strategies and insights related to personal goals and actual literacy demands. One survey respondent wrote the following when asked what information they provide:

Useless. Milestones in no way reflect learners’ progress and are so far out of line with the program of study. A proper, traditional, curriculum makes more sense ie ACE/LBS guideline.

In addition, the leveling system is inconsistent and not aligned with the way individuals acquire skills, knowledge, strategies and insights. One respondent wrote the following:

Milestones are often in too big a chunk for learners in Secondary School goal path to show progress. There are so many skills needed to prepare for PLAR and credit system.

Another respondent provided an example of this inconsistency:

The Milestones often are inconsistent in the 'jump' between levels. This is most clear with Writing B2; the difference between what is needed between level 2 and 3 is a significant jump. While in another competency the skill jump is somewhat more sensible.

An interview participant also provided a specific example:

Between Milestone 54 and 55 there is too big a gap in terms of the content. I also noticed large gaps [between two levels] with some other Milestone tasks and the content is too different.”

The Milestones' methodological adherence to some of the international literacy survey's development methods and leveling framework restricts their pedagogical usefulness. The OALCF descriptors, regulated by the international literacy survey's level descriptions, are describing scoring protocols and not individual abilities. The scoring protocols and related level descriptions do not provide information about the ways that individuals could move through a developmental set of skills as they develop a repertoire of literacy uses. They only describe elements that make a test task difficult. The OALCF level descriptors are intended to describe the complexity of test tasks and not the development of individual skills. When examined, separately from a test task, the descriptors do not provide pedagogically useful information about literacy development.

Some assessors are attempting to make such a limited system work. One respondent felt that the Milestones could be more useful without the reporting pressures.

If there were less pressure to hurriedly demonstrate progress without regard to the nature of the learners (who often have problems learning very quickly and tend to attend sporadically), I think Milestones would more truly reflect what they were intended to. Instructors would be able to administer them more thoughtfully and at an appropriate time if they weren't penalized for this but rather enabled to do this.

However, to make the Milestones work for teaching and learning purposes, the respondent acknowledged that they would need a complete set of learning resources that aligned with the Milestones.

Also, we don't have teaching materials that line up directly and easily with the Milestones so it is extremely time-consuming to make sure that the Milestone matches what has been learned, which is only fair.

Her comment suggests that the Milestones could only work pedagogically with their own set of resources. This indicates that they are indeed disconnected from current program teaching and learning approaches and practices. Emphasizing their overall disconnection from programs and inability to show progress is the following comment:

Milestones aren't really related to what we teach to prepare them for college. Most will score the same on Milestones the day they start and the day they leave. They're not really a measure of progress, just a measure for the ministry to use.

Lack of Meaning and Relevance for Learners

What this disconnection does, as one survey respondent aptly noted, is disconnect the OALCF from learners, leading to a compliance-centred system that has no meaning or relevance to learners beyond fulfilling mandated accountability requirements. One survey commentator stated that it is “not an easy task to have a learner complete a milestone when they see no relevance for it.” Another wrote the following:

The Ministry claims that LBS programs are learner centred, but the very manner in which the Milestones are created and implemented are absolutely not learner centred. Their claims to the contrary are simply disingenuous.

There were more positive comments. However, they focused on the usefulness of the Milestones as an accountability tool, and not as a pedagogical tool.

They have their validity ... some are ambiguous. Task related is good. They fulfill the assessment mandate and they are standardized which is good. Many of our learners are computer savvy already when they come to us.

The survey respondent focused on their role as an accountability tool and indirectly indicates that they are not useful or relevant to learners since most in this respondent's program enter with program with a high level of digital skills.

In general, comments not focused on limitations reiterate stated purposes and uses of the Milestones documented in the guidelines, and none describe other contributions. Respondents are not stating that the Milestones make their work easier or more straightforward. They do not state that the Milestones provide useful pedagogical information to build their curricula, and they do not state that the Milestones provide information about specific skill development and literacy use outside the testing situation. One respondent actually emphasized their disconnection from program activities and learners by pointing out how they only provide information related to the testing situation and the ability of a learner to complete a test:

Milestones are merely a snapshot of learner ability. They are effective for gains in confidence, skills and resourcefulness.

An interview participant made the following point about organization and ease that the Milestones and accompanying OALCF provide:

What is the information that we are not capturing but should be? We do what we do but we are not 100% sure. In terms of the Milestones it's very clear. If you do a really good assessment it leads right into where you are going with your Milestones. You start with the lowest level and then you go up to the next level and that's all that is. If you have this [OALCF document] and this [Milestone Index] you can do the Milestones.

What is not considered in the two comments in their usefulness beyond the testing situation and beyond the abstract textual system devised to describe literacy for accountability purposes. Indeed, when examined in isolation, the OALCF documents and Milestone system appear to be a well organized and succinct package that presents information about literacy and numeracy in a straightforward and clear manner. However, their use in the context of programs, as has been described is far more complex. In the context of teaching and learning for specific purposes and personal goals, the Milestones become a barrier and requirement that must be accommodated, rather than a facilitator of sound pedagogical practice. Furthermore, Milestones in general may not even be able to provide useful information about progress for accountability purposes since, despite having standardized content, their administration is being modified and adapted. The Milestones that are administered as intended, i.e. the most commonly used digital technology Milestones however have no standardized content. As a barrier and not a facilitator, they also complicate relations between learners and educators, and between program staff and ministry staff.

Complicating Student-Instructor and Program-Funder Relations

Another, more pointed critique indicates how the Milestones can become a point of disagreement and an impediment, potentially leading to tensions and distrust between educators and learners, and between programs and the ministry.

One survey respondent adamantly stated that they are a “waste of time.” She went on to explain the following:

Students understand that it is a Ministry requirement and recognize that they do not "fit" anywhere in their studies. Milestones provide NO relevant information other than a check box for the ministry.

Another survey respondent simply stated that “learners comply with administration of them because we ask them to do them as part of their learning.” Educators are compelled to use an assessment that they

know is irrelevant and meaningless. The same survey respondent added, “We find that the learner does well in the day to day activities leading up to the Milestone, but will often not succeed doing the Milestone, often because they hurry or they do not read carefully and follow the steps.”

Interview participants did however point out the usefulness of the Milestones for administrative purposes, one of the only clear purposes described in the guidelines. An interview participant from a college program said,

The students are coming to me and talking about Milestones. When do I need to do a Milestone? So they're connected to the funder in that way. I can talk similar curriculum with my community-based partners now. I could never do that before.

Another interview participant from a community-based program pointed out the common language they provide:

I think the framework is a really good idea. [...] I didn't have the level language and I had to learn when I came in and I had to make sense of it. If you talk Essential Skills you can talk to everybody. The curriculum framework helps to understand everywhere in Ontario what we are talking about and working towards a common assessment is a great idea. [...] We have taken away the mystique of literacy.

While the OALCF and frameworks like the Essential Skills may provide a common language, this is a generalized and abstract language that obscures discussions about particular literacy uses, demands and accomplishments. The use of this particular common, abstracted and personally irrelevant language could also curtail the inclination of program staff to engage in broader discussions about learners and pedagogical insights. The OALCF does not provide a common language based on meeting the specific needs of LBS clients, which may improve the service quality of delivery programs and the LBS Program as a whole, it provides a common language based on reporting requirements and accountability.

An interview participant described how she doesn't even pretend that the Milestones have any usefulness, except as a compliance measure.

I always say this is how we prove to the government that you're learning. This is the proof that your tax dollars are being put to good use. That's the way that I put it to them because 'these are our tax dollars they are funding this.' And they're quite happy to be able to do that.

At the same time, she de-emphasizes their pedagogical purpose.

I don't call it a test or an assessment; it's an activity. I don't call it a test or an assessment because if the student doesn't attain the Milestone that doesn't mean that they are going to fail my course. It has no bearing on that.

The message being conveyed is to suggest that the only interest that the ministry has in programs and adult learners is financial, and not a broader educational and social interest.

Attempting to reconcile the aim of learner centred programming with an accountability centred assessment system can be challenging, and can lead to contradictory responses. One interview participant explained how her program made the effort to maintain its learners centred aims once the OALCF was introduced.

We felt very strongly that with all this new structure, a lot was being taken out of the learners' hands. We used to have the learners develop their own training plans, with help and guidance from the practitioner. But now that we have this standardized learning plan and the enhanced digital one, we really felt that was taking a lot away from them. We wanted them to own whatever they could of that learning plan. It was important to keep them as part of the equations and not just say, 'This is what we are going to have you do.'

Although these were her intentions, reporting pressures have led to the use of MS 54 to ensure there is a completed Milestone. "Your learner doesn't count unless there is a Milestone completed. This made us very conscientious about ensuring this." In addition, Milestone administration is integrated with the registration and intake process, and a program orientation day was developed around Milestone 57. Her colleague said that they are prevented from discussing the results of the Milestone with learners, further interfering with the intention to be learner centred. "I just don't see that as serving the learners," said one participant. Another added, "It upsets some learners too. They want the feedback. They want to see their progress."

Another interview participant also discussed the emotional impact that the Milestones can have on learners. The participant explained that the way Milestones have to be administered in a formalized setting with limited learner support and meaningful discussion makes it difficult for assessors to create a supportive environment for learner who are in "panic mode."

A college assessor explained how she has carefully thought about how to talk to students about the Milestones in order to limit their involvement in the process.

Assessor: I've tried to have an eye on how much do we involve the students or how much do we impose on the students? And then that times 700. Is this the best use of our time

and how we do things? I think we've managed to minimize it. They understand Milestones form goal orientation so they know it's coming up and it's going to be part of all their courses.

Interviewer: How do you frame it—as a reporting tool or learning progress tool?

Assessor: It's about showing your progress to the ministry. Yep, it is. This fits within the context of the course but we do need to report to the ministry on what you're doing in our program and this is the mechanism that we use to do that.

Another interview participant drew attention to the vulnerable position that learners are in, revealing how they are completely disengaged from the process and have little power to express their disagreement or to even question the process.

Like I say to people, when a learner walks through my door, they have no idea about what I do here. So if I said to them, 'You have to eat a banana everyday in order to pass my course,' they would do that. If I say, 'now you're going to do a Milestone.' They say, 'Okay.'

Relations between program assessors and ministry staff are also complicated. An interview participant from a community-based program described an on-going dilemma and disagreement she was having with her ministry representative or ETC. The representative was pressuring her to administer Milestones to learners soon after they entered the program. But the assessor insisted on administering the Milestone after they had completed planned activities in order to indicate progress as stipulated in the *Milestone Guidelines*.

How can you do a Milestone when they're not even done the activities that you laid out for them? Especially with the six or four week program. I'm not ready to give them the Milestone because they're not done the material.

Most interview participants described how they administer a Milestone soon after a learner registers or at the point of registration. Such a fundamental discrepancy related to the role of the Milestones (i.e. simply to comply with accountability or to actually represent progress) could have a detrimental impact on programs that do in fact attempt to use the Milestones as described, as they may not be able to demonstrate the same number of completions as another similar program, which administers a Milestone as part of intake processes.

An interview participant from a community-based program described the level of anxiety around reporting requirements, including the Milestones:

All the service providers were terrified that they were getting funding pulled if they don't get the numbers in and if they don't have the Milestones. So there is all that tension implementing without the skill base to know what we are actually doing. This whole curriculum framework didn't change what we did at all, we changed the language but we still do the same things, we are using text books, we are teaching to specific skills, we always try to show you how to use the skills in the real world [...] so we are changing how we are reporting it, but the other information we want we are tracking ourselves.

Assessors described some creative approaches they have devised to comply with ministry reporting requirements. One survey respondent explained her process, including not reporting any Milestones that aren't completed successfully.

Milestones are silly in their present form...I appreciate the need for a structured and consistent method of evaluation, but the Milestones miss the mark. I generally regard them as a means to an administrative end rather than an educational tool. I never select Milestones at intake to get service plans open ASAP, but I also rarely select them in the way that they are intended (select a planned start date, end date, mark the actual start and finish as the student progresses, etc.). I get my students to attempt a Milestone and enter it if they complete it. If they aren't successful, I don't record it since it is a waste of my time and will reflect negatively on my program.

Her comments suggest that she has diminished the overall significance of the Milestones because they are so disconnected from educational goals. She sees them as silly and a waste of time, since they only fulfil accountability requirements. In response, she interprets the guidelines as she sees fit, without worrying about compliance in a system that is so disconnected from program purposes and learners.

An interview participant explained that program-based learning plans may have two to three Milestones selected, but she puts only one in the reporting system in case learners aren't able to complete all of them. The one selected Milestone is also completed, ensuring she meets the minimal Milestone completion requirement for each learner.

Another interview participant acknowledged that she isn't supposed to administer a Milestone during the initial assessment process, but it's the only way to count learners who could leave soon after.

In addition to the way the Milestones are not designed to reflect learner goals and individual literacy development, the reporting system itself is not designed to relate to an educational system. One survey respondent wrote the following:

A bigger issue is CAMS. It is not a teaching tool. It is an administrative system of accountability. It is just about impossible to get a sense of what a learner actually knows from using CAMS. As a teacher, I am stuck with tracking student success separately (using traditional methods). What I enter in CAMS rarely reflects this success...it is simply a collection of Milestones and learning activities that I enter because our program stats require it.

An interview participant described how she has run out of Milestones to use. Learners who have previously completed Milestones in another program need to complete a different Milestone. But sometimes, there are no appropriate Milestones.

There are likely many reasons that an accountability-centred system rather than a learning and learner-centred system evolved. Investigating these is beyond the scope of this study. However, one crucial reason for the complications, confusions, misinterpretations, reporting stresses and overall limitations were summed up by one interview participant: “Nobody asked the people who are doing the service what kind of information is important to capture.”

Summary

The OALCF and the Milestones are an accountability-centred and not a learner-centred curriculum reform. They are an abstract and virtual representation of the LBS system without pedagogically useful connections to actual learner goals, and without considering actual literacy demands and processes required to pursue those goals. Their disconnection is a direct result of the methodological design and adherence to the OECD testing framework. In addition, administration guidelines that restrict instructor access, prohibit follow-up discussion with learners and the overall formality of Milestone administration contribute to the disconnect, as they emphasize their role as an assessment for accountability and not to support learning and learners.

Study participants described various challenges, contradictions and confusions they experienced and stated the following about the Milestones:

- They are too difficult for some learners, contain confusing instructions, an unfamiliar questioning approach and unfamiliar content
- Too simplistic for other learners as they do not adhere to the more complex and comprehensive reading comprehension approach
- Disconnected from learner goals, program purposes and the existing curriculum in use
- Unable to provide useful information about progress

- They lack meaning and relevance for learners
- Can be confusing to administer
- Are not widely accessible and therefore difficult for instructors to review and analyse in order to adequately prepare their students.

Practices Developed to Make the Milestones Useable

To address these challenges, some instructors, assessors and coordinators said they do the following:

- Keep learners off the books (i.e. do not input their information in EOIS-CaMS) until they are ready to complete a Milestone
- Offset those learners who take longer to complete a Milestone with different learners who can more readily complete a Milestone by developing short-term courses for those with employment goals rather than focus on those with academic goals that take longer to achieve
- Develop a glossary to help learners understand the content, the instructions and test questions, which learners can then refer to during the test session
- Develop Milestone preparation courses and/or develop new learning materials to ensure that the selected Milestones align with day-to-day teaching and learning
- Develop practice Milestones that mimic the actual Milestone to prepare learners; there may be some confusion created when using LBS demonstrations that do not follow an information-processing approach
- Disregard Milestone administration requirements and guidelines such as not waiting six weeks to re-administer, not reporting incomplete Milestones, not reporting all selected Milestones, administering Milestones in ASL, and administering Milestones during intake and registration
- Administer the same Milestones because they are familiar with the content, and can predict if a student is ready to complete the Milestone
- Have a learner complete a Milestone that is not related to his/her goal path if no other Milestone is available, or if a learner changes goals because too much time is needed to prepare the learner to complete a different Milestone.

Complicating Working Relations, Expertise and Learner Well-being

Milestone related challenges, contradictions and confusions have complicated and may even damage working relations between learners and instructors/assessors, and between program staff and ministry representatives. They also erode assessor/instructor expertise, leading instructors/assessors to question their pedagogically-based decisions in light of accountability requirements. More worrisome, they isolate adult learners, prevent their active involvement in the assessment process, and create an anxiety inducing testing situation. They have even led to questions about whether LBS is a program that can accommodate adult non-readers and emergent readers.

Complications include the following:

- Indecision about reporting an incomplete Milestone when a learner has met her program goal and is accepted into a secondary credit program, leading to an instructor questioning her expertise and abilities
- Restricting more meaningful and relevant pedagogical discussions when communicating with colleagues using the language of the OALCF and Milestones to describe student achievements and abilities
- Emphasizing the accountability purpose of the Milestones and creating a barrier between adults and the ministry that suggests the LBS program only has with fiscal concerns and not broader social and educational interests
- Intentionally limiting the amount of information shared with learners about the Milestones and OALCF in order to shield learners and disengage them from a process that is not intended to operate in their interests
- Complicating and even preventing efforts of assessors and instructors to be learner-centred when choosing Milestones due to reporting pressures
- Creating unnecessary test anxiety in some learners who could also have previous negative experiences in education
- Disengaging learners from the process by preventing them from discussing and reviewing Milestone results, and by making the process mandatory for all learners, including those with mild developmental disabilities, learning disabilities and visual impairments
- Putting assessors in a vulnerable position when ETCs emphasize reporting requirements that contradict Milestone administration guidelines

- Introducing unnecessary anxiety and stress because funding decisions will be partly based on Milestone targets.

Part 7: Conclusion

The OALCF and the Milestones are a compliance-centred curriculum reform and not a learner and learning-centred reform that work counter to LBS objectives.

The reform prevents programs from demonstrating actual progress and learner accomplishments, which directly impacts and conflicts with the aim of LBS to “ensure accountability to all stakeholders”⁵³.

What is most apparent is a series of inequitable impacts that privilege some programs, like the college program described in this study, but are detrimental to others, like the small community-based program described. Depending on the size of school boards and the integration of their LBS programs within continuing education, they could operate similar to the college program described or to the community-based program described. The inequitable impacts are the result of inequitable program resources, diverse program contexts and distinct learner profiles. The inequities undermine the ability of the LBS system to work in a coordinated way, and also make it harder for some programs to “support learners’ successful transitions” compared to others.

Also apparent are a series of inequitable impacts that are detrimental to adult learners with the least amount of education, including those with disabilities who are not able to access appropriate testing accommodations. This makes the Milestones an unfair assessment, as they advantage learners with higher levels of education and disadvantage those with lower levels of education and with disabilities. This undermines the ability of programs to be learner-centred and “respect learners and provide a supportive learning environment.”

The Milestones are also unfair because they are not assessing what is actually taught and learned in programs to help learners meet their goals. They introduce a novel testing approach that is distinct from commonly used standardized tests in the education system. They also introduce a novel pedagogy derived in part from international literacy surveys, which is distinct from the predominant reading comprehension approach, most published instructional materials and the expertise of instructors. In essence, programs are being held accountable for things they don’t actually do. Not only does this undermine fundamental principles of accountability and fair testing, it also undermines the ability of programs to follow sound adult education and adult literacy pedagogy and their ability to deliver “quality instruction.” The exclusion of learners from the assessment process conflicts with the LBS principle to “include learners in decisions

⁵³ Refer to page 5 for all references to LBS objectives unless noted otherwise in Ministry of Training Colleges and Universities (2014) *LBS Service Provider Guidelines*. Available at http://www.tcu.gov.on.ca/eng/eopg/publications/lbs_2014_2015_service_provider_guidelines_sdb_approved.pdf

that affect them” because of administrative protocols and restrictions, the disconnection of content from learner goals, and the strategies that programs have developed.

A stated aim of LBS is to “provide literacy services to those most in need of them” and “provide high quality instruction and services to adults who lack the literacy and basic skills they need to achieve goals”, yet the OALCF Milestones are derived from a theoretical framework that was not designed to assess individual literacy learning and basic skill development, and that does not recognize the skills of adults who have less than 8 –10 years of formal education. This fundamental contradiction raises questions about whether LBS remains accessible to adult non-readers and those with the least educational resources.

The adaptations and modifications made to the underlying theoretical framework result in a unique OALCF Curriculum Framework that is distinct from the international literacy surveys and provincial K-12 literacy development curriculum. This undermines the ability of the LBS curricular system to be “linked to the broader education system and labour market.” The LBS curricular system does not in fact “complement the broader education and training system” but is detached from it. It also means the aim to connect the LBS system with international literacy survey results was not met.

MTCU’s emphasis on the compliance function of the Milestones over learners and learning has led to the development of yet another barrier for those who already experience and have experienced multiple education and learning barriers, a direct contradiction of the stated aims of the LBS program. It also suggests that fiscal concerns are more important than the ministry’s claim that the aim of LBS is to “provide opportunities to make it easier for individuals to improve their skills through education and training.”⁵⁴

Mis-steps and next steps

Three fundamental mis-steps were taken when the OALCF was conceived and developed. Current MTCU policy analysts need to recognize the far-reaching impacts of these decisions, many of which were made before the full integration of LBS into Employment Ontario. Acknowledging the mis-steps can also inform future work and next steps related to the development and use of curricular accountability measures in the ministry’s performance management framework. The mis-steps are

1. An attempt to develop a standardized assessment and performance evaluation system for a **non-standardized and highly diverse LBS program** with inequitable resources, learners with highly varied educational experiences, learners with disabilities, sectors with distinct goal path profiles

⁵⁴ Refer to page 2, *LBS Service Provider Guidelines*.

requiring diverse curricular supports, a wide range of program participation intensity and duration levels, and a range of professional standards for instructors

2. The decision to transpose international literacy survey methods developed for the purpose of analysing the distribution of skills in the population into an educational context and a system designed to support basic literacy development
3. The development of a highly complex and demanding assessment scheme comprised of three distinct approaches to assessment, without consistent oversight, review, and analysis including rigorous validation and reliability processes.

While much of this research reveals how and why the OALCF Milestones in their current form works counter to established educational practices and LBS objectives. The research also reveals how one aspect of the Milestones, the digital technology Milestones, offers several important insights that could be used to inform the development of a curricular accountability system that support learners and learning.

As next steps in the future of the OALCF, the researchers strongly recommend a comprehensive review of the OALCF Curriculum Framework and Milestones. Until this review is complete, results from Milestones and other mandated assessments should not be used to make funding decisions.

This review needs to consider whether LBS has the resources and capacity to develop, implement and continuously support a complex standardized assessment scheme requiring on-going validation and reliability analysis. Rigorous, reliable and fair standardized assessments are expensive to develop and maintain. Further, one has to question if a single standardized approach is even possible in such a diverse and non-standardized LBS program.

If curricular accountability measures continue to be used, key mechanisms should be non-standardized and reflect the array of literacy and numeracy practices that learners develop in programs, reflecting what programs actually do. Their development should involve front-line practitioners, adult literacy learning experts working directly with MTCU as equal partners. A mechanism to involve learners in a meaningful way in the process also needs to be considered. The expertise and experiences of front-line practitioners need to be recognized by including them in on-going consultations about the adjustments and further implementation of a Milestone system so that it is truly learning- and learner-centred.

This research also revealed that the design differences and appeal of the digital technology Milestones provide important insights that could inform such adjustments. A truly learner-centred process means instructors and learners are directly involved and have control over content, context and complexity. Their direct involvement would help ensure that the Milestones

- Contain content that is familiar and relevant to individual learners at an appropriate development level, including recognizable images, symbols, place and organization names, etc.
- Use follow-up responses and test questioning approaches aligned with goal paths and learner goals
- Have a direct connection to teaching and learning, and
- Become an assessment that supports learning and meaningful conversations about literacy development.

Last but not least, the participants in this study expressed a need for more digital technology tasks. This research supports the further development of the concept of digital literacy and digital curricular supports that are integrated with reading and communication and numeracy. Literacy should be looked at in a much more integrated way that acknowledges reading and working in digital environments. Any adjustments to the OALCF and the Milestones need to accommodate this reality.

Appendix 1: The Performance Management Framework and Its Evolving Development

Interim Performance Management Framework and Provincial Service Quality Standard

The LBS Interim Performance Management Framework and the Service Quality Standard (SQS) will be implemented in two phases: in 2012-13 and in 2014-15.

Phase I will start in 2012-13 and continue in 2013-14. Data will be collected in 2012-13 and 2013-14 for all seven measures; however, for those two years of Phase I, service providers will only be held to standards set for three of the seven measures. Past results reported through IMS indicate a Customer Satisfaction rate of 85% is being achieved and will continue to be the standard. The standard for Learners Served will be set at 90%, consistent with the Employment Services Program. For Suitability/Learner Profile, the Information Management System (IMS) indicates in 2010/11 a standard of 29% for the two indicators already collected: Age (over 45 and under 65) and OW/ODSP recipient. Data will also be collected for ten (10) new Suitability/Learner Profile indicators (total 12), and four (4) new measures: Service Coordination, Completion of Goal Path, Learner Progress, and Learner Gains.

Phase I (2012-14)

| DIMENSION | MEASURE | MINIMUM STANDARD | WEIGHT | SQS VALUE |
|---------------------------------|--|------------------|--------|-------------|
| Customer Service (33%) | 1. Customer Satisfaction | 85% | 33.33% | 2.83 |
| Effectiveness (33%) | 2. Suitability / Learner Profile <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • OW/ODSP • Age (>45 to <64) | 29% | 33.33% | 0.97 |
| Efficiency (33%) | 3. Learners Served | 90% | 33.33% | 3.00 |
| Service Quality Standard | | | | 6.80 |

Notes:

Past provincial results reported through the LBS IMS indicate:

Customer Satisfaction: 85% (85% of learners who exit will indicate overall satisfaction with the LBS Program)

Suitability / Learner Profile:

OW / ODSP: 34% (34% of learners are in receipt of OW/ODSP)

Age (>45 and <64): 24% (24% of learners are aged over 45 and under 64)

Target Achievement: 90% (90% of the targeted number of learners on the Schedule B achieved).

The interim SQS for Phase I has been set at 6.80-.

Phase II (i.e., mature state) starts 2014-15. The Ministry will start implementing the LBS Performance Management Framework through the 2014-15 business planning process. At that time, the Ministry will have enough baseline data to set new as well as revised targets for ALL seven measures within the framework and establish a new SQS. This information will be communicated to LBS service providers in the 2014-2015 business planning process. These targets and standards will form the base of the performance commitments within Schedule B of the 2014-2015 transfer payment agreement.

Phase II (2014-15)

| DIMENSION | MEASURE | STANDARD |
|------------------------|---|----------|
| Customer Service (30%) | 1. Customer Satisfaction | 85% |
| | 2. Service Coordination | TBD |
| Effectiveness (60%) | 3 – Suitability / Learner Profile (all 12 indicators) | TBD |
| | 4. Learner Progress | TBD |
| | 5. Completion of Goal Path | TBD |
| | 6. Learner Gains | TBD |
| Efficiency (10%) | 7. Learners Served | 90% |

Notes:

The measure of Learner Profile will have to be redefined based on the full roster of indicators at mature state.

The overall SQS (i.e. out of 10) will be determined based on analysis from data collection from Phase I.

Appendix 2: Data Collection and Analysis Overview

Data was collected from September to December, 2014. A description of each data source and data collection tools and approaches follows.

1. Administrative Data

We requested and received the following types of administrative data (i.e. data form EOIS-CaMS) for the most recent fiscal year (2013-2014):

- Provincial statistical reports by sector and stream
- Milestone selection (in progress) and completion numbers for all 60 English and French Milestones
- Digital technology English and French Milestone selection and completion by stream, sector, goal path and education attainment.

To facilitate this request we devised six data collection questions and corresponding tables to indicate the type of data that we were seeking (see Appendix 4). Data were synthesized to determine the most commonly used Milestones and DT use trends.

2. Survey Data and Development of a Questionnaire

A survey for instructors and program administrators who administer the Milestones was developed in English and French. We wanted to ensure that we were reaching those who have first-hand knowledge of the way Milestones are used in programs. Respondents were asked a screening question at the beginning of the survey. The table below provides an overview of each section in the survey and the type of questions used to address specific topics (refer to Appendix 5 for the full survey).

Table 17: Assessor Survey Topics and Question Types

| Topic | Types of Questions |
|---|--|
| Screening question | Limited response |
| Program, network affiliation and general work and learner information | Both limited response and multiple response questions and opportunity to elaborate |
| Assessor roles and responsibilities | Series of rating questions (frequency) and short answers |
| Additional assessments and curriculum frameworks | Both limited response and multiple response questions and opportunity to elaborate |

| | |
|--------------------------------------|--|
| Milestone selection and DT selection | Series of rating questions (frequency) and short answers |
| Milestones, progress and learning | Series of rating questions (opinion) and short answers |

After an initial English version of the survey was developed it was reviewed by four adult literacy program experts to ensure that

- The survey had face validity and posed questions in a way that aligned with typical experiences in programs and general practices in relation to EOIS-CaMS reporting and Milestone administration
- The questions were straightforward and worded in a direct and easy to follow manner, and to ensure that the survey questions were aligned with the overall intent of the project and its guiding research questions
- There were no ambiguous terms
- The timing was not onerous; and to ensure that
- There were opportunities for respondents to openly express their opinions and share some of their experiences.

Once the feedback was integrated, the survey was translated into French and reviewed by one of the researchers. The content was then uploaded and further reviewed by both researchers in Survey Monkey. An invitation inviting instructors and coordinators to complete the survey was sent by AlphaPlus to each network (i.e. region, sector and stream) with the aim of reaching key contacts in every program. A follow-up email was sent after the first two weeks only to two networks that showed no representation among the responses. The survey was available for a total of six weeks. All responses remain anonymous, except if a respondent chose to provide contact information in order to participate in the project evaluation and potential follow-up activities.

Data were synthesized to produce an overall description of respondents (the sample) and response counts and frequencies. Qualitative data from open-ended survey questions were compiled, synthesized and organized under categories in preparation for the combined data analysis.

Respondent Profile. The respondent group is a purposeful sample comprised of instructors, coordinators or coordinators (referred to as assessors in the study) who administer the Milestones. Since we were unable to determine the total number who has this role in the EOIS/CaMS system, due to people having multiple and overlapping roles, we were not able to statistically relate (generalize) the sample to the popula-

tion. To access the sample, we sent an invitation to participate in the study to all regional and sectoral networks, and then requested that the invitation and accompanying link to the survey be forwarded to staff in all programs.

A total of 210 participants started to complete the survey but 24 screened themselves out and did not continue to answer questions, when they indicated that they did not deliver the Milestones. In addition, a handful of other participants stopped at that point, leaving 181 who went on to participate in the survey (158 continued the English survey and 23 the French survey). Their engagement with the survey was consistent, and we had a response range of 158-181 on the primary questions.

We compared the respondent numbers with the proportion of learners enrolled in programs using EOIS-CaMS provincial reports for 2013-2014. Comparing the proportion of respondents with the proportion of enrolments provides a general sense of whether or not the respondent profile aligns with the overall program profile. Respondent numbers by sector in the table below indicate that those from community programs were more inclined to participate in the survey, compared to those from college programs who were less inclined. There is however more of an alignment between school board enrolment numbers and respondents who stated they work in that sector.

Table 18: Respondent Profile by Sector

| | Respondents | | Percent of Learners by Sector 2013-2014 |
|--------------|-------------|---------|---|
| | Count | Percent | |
| College | 43 | 24% | 39% |
| Community | 76 | 43% | 31% |
| School Board | 49 | 28% | 31% |
| Other | 10 | 6% | n/a |
| TOTAL | 178 | | |

Respondent numbers by cultural group/stream in the table below indicate that each of the cultural groups participated. Participation from Francophone and Deaf/Deaf Blind is particularly strong.

Table 19: Respondent Profile by Cultural Group (Stream)

| | Respondents | | Percent of Learners by Sector 2013-2014 |
|--|-------------|---------|---|
| | Count | Percent | |

| | | | |
|----------------------|-----|-----|-----|
| English (Anglophone) | 122 | 69% | 88% |
| Aboriginal (Native) | 15 | 8% | 5% |
| Deaf and Deaf/Blind | 12 | 7% | 1% |
| French (Francophone) | 23 | 13% | 7% |
| Other | 6 | 3% | n/a |
| TOTAL | 178 | | |

Additional respondent profile information follows.

- Respondents were from all four regions: central (32%), north (29%), west (25%), and east (15%).
- One third of respondents work in one-to-one programs; one-quarter work in programs with small groups; and the remainder (about one-tenth each) work with medium groups, large groups/classes and independent study learners.
- Just over half of the respondents (58%) are permanent, salaried employees; only one volunteer responded; over one-quarter (27%) stated they work on long-term contracts; and one tenth (10%) work on short-term contracts.
- The vast majority of respondents (84%) work over 21 hours per week, and a strong majority of respondents (77%) have at least five to nine years of experience, and just over one-tenth (12%) have 20 or more years of work experience.

Overall, the respondents are a highly experienced group of adult literacy educators. In addition, their regular work hours indicate that they are likely involved in a variety of program practices and have gained in-depth knowledge and expertise, which likely extends to the role and use of the Milestone assessments.

3. Site Visits and In-depth Interviews

Two researchers visited six programs and seven sites representing the streams, sectors, regions, locations in remote/rural, urban and smaller communities, program sizes and face-to-face delivery structures (i.e. one-to-one, classes, small groups, etc.). (Refer to Appendix 6 for an invitation to participate and study overview). In-depth interviews were organized with individuals and groups. We interviewed a total of 26 instructors and coordinators at six programs and seven program sites. Each interview lasted approximately two hours. The interviews were designed to address the same topics as those in the survey, but in an open-ended and conversational manner in order to delve into each topic from the perspective of the assessor (see Appendix 7 for an interview guide).

The anonymity and privacy of all interview participants has been safe-guarded. Their names, roles and programs are not specifically identified. General terms are used to describe programs (i.e. community, college, school board), their structure, and people’s roles (i.e. instructors or coordinators). When using quotations we refer to the speaker in a general way as an interview participant, except when the participant is describing an issue that is directly related to a particular stream or sector. This helps to ensure anonymity and also emphasizes that most issues are not particular to a stream or sector. We received consent from all participants. The consents also outlined anonymity and privacy protocols (see Appendix 8).

Table 20: Interviewee Program Profile

| Program | Number of Participants | Stream | | | | Sector | | | Region | | | |
|---------------------------|------------------------|--------|---|---|---|--------|----|-----|--------|---|---|---|
| | | A | F | N | D | COM | SB | COL | C | E | W | N |
| College (two sites) | 2 | x | | | | | | x | | x | | |
| School Board | 3 | x | | | | | x | | | x | | |
| Community North | 2 | x | | | | x | | | | | | x |
| Community West | 1 | | | x | | x | | | | | x | |
| Community East | 15 | | x | | | x | | | | x | | |
| College/Community Central | 3 | | | | x | | | x | x | | | |
| | 26 | 3 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 3 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 3 | 1 | 1 |

Detailed narratives of the interviews were developed based on listening to the recordings and reviewing notes. The data was initially organized using similar categories as the assessor survey. Verbatim quotations were included. Interview data was then converged with the assessor data to develop topics. The data was then reanalysed based on the topics.

Limitations and Literacy Perspective

Findings from the survey and interviews are not generalizable to all practitioners/instructors and coordinators who administer the Milestones, nor are they statistically representative of all programs and program practices. However, our findings do convey a compelling and rigorous portrayal of practices, concerns and pedagogical issues with the Milestones, particularly since much of the data are from those who have the most experience using the Milestones and witness their impacts on learners. Although we did not include learners in the study, practitioners provided tremendous insight into the learning experiences and responses of learners to the Milestones.

Findings from EOIS-CaMS data would represent wide-spread practices, as these data are generated from provincial reports submitted by all programs. When calculating percentages, a .5 was rounded up to the nearest whole number.

We view the Milestones, similar to any assessment or text, as a situated literacy practice. This means they are situated in a very specific context and have been created to fulfil certain purposes. Milestone texts convey meaning and information in a particular way. What learners do to ascertain and demonstrate their understanding in the testing situation is not necessarily what they do outside the testing situation, even when responding to similar texts. The literacy skills, knowledge, strategies and insights used when completing the various Milestone test tasks are also situated, and do not automatically transfer from the testing situation to everyday use.

Appendix 3: Chronology of Assessment and Curricular Changes for Accountability Purposes

| Curricular Outcomes Statements and Related Mechanisms | Audited and Monitored Devices for Accountability |
|--|---|
| Recognition of Adult Learning Project, local initiatives 1994-1996 | |
| <p>Statements of learning called embedded skills were developed across three levels and five domains (i.e. reading, writing, research and reporting, numeracy, computers)</p> <p>Portfolios of student achievements and suggestions for appropriate tasks to include in portfolios were mandated</p> | <p>Ministry staff checked to see that each student had a portfolio, but no mandated device was in use to ensure that embedded skills were integrated with the tasks or to include certain tasks in portfolios</p> |
| Working with Learning Outcomes: An Introduction, 1997 | |
| <p>Statements of learning called foundation outcomes were developed across three levels and nine domains (four communications domains and five numeracy domains)</p> <p>Portfolios of student achievements and suggestions for appropriate tasks to include in portfolios were mandated</p> | <p>Ministry staff checked to see that each student had a portfolio, but no mandated device was in use to ensure that foundation skills were integrated with the demonstrations/tasks or to include certain demonstrations/tasks in portfolios</p> |
| Goal-directed Assessment: An Initial Assessment Process, 1997 | |
| <p>Document described in great detail a goal-setting and training plan process in which educators developed statements of learning to be documented in a training plan template</p> | <p>Ministry staff checked to see that each student had a training plan and portfolio, but no mandated device was in use to integrate curricular statements in training plan; educator and learner could devise their own statements to describe progress and achievements</p> |
| Working with Learning Outcomes (Validation Draft), 1998 | |
| <p>Detailed listing of sets of curricular outcomes statements across five levels and 10 domains, referred to as the matrix</p> | <p>Ministry staff checked to see that the training plan incorporated matrix statements to describe progress; educator/learner statements could continue to be used</p> <p>Checklists and rubrics using matrix statements had to be attached to sample work in the portfolio; they could operate as an afterthought and did not have to interfere with sample work</p> |

| <i>The Level Descriptions Manual, 2000 and demonstrations (tasks) development initiative</i> | |
|---|---|
| <p>Simplified listing of the matrix renamed the level descriptions used across five levels and eight domains</p> <p>Training plan template and accompanying tracking sheets using level descriptions indicators</p> <p>Demonstrations or tasks that emulated literacy applications were created by programs, which served as assessments that integrated level descriptions</p> <p>Common sets of demonstrations or tasks were developed by educators and curriculum developers for all programs (e.g., Common Assessment of Basic Skills or CABS, Demonstrations Ontario)</p> <p>Training sessions conducted to teach educators how to create their own demonstrations/tasks</p> | <p>Ministry staff checked for completed training plans that organized learning using level descriptions and educator/learner statements</p> <p>Checklists and rubrics using level descriptions or matrix statements were attached to sample work in portfolio; they could continue to operate as an afterthought</p> <p>Introduction of a new approach to developing demonstrations in order to clearly show the accomplishment of specific outcomes described in the level descriptions; the content and format of the demonstration was modelled but not mandated</p> |
| Essential Skills (mandated integration from 2008-2010) | |
| <p>Training plan template and accompanying tracking sheets using Essential Skills indicators</p> <p>Demonstrations/tasks created by programs, which served as assessments</p> <p>Common sets of demonstrations/tasks for all programs (e.g., Common Assessment of Basic Skills or CABS) that were then aligned to the Essential Skills (ILT levels)</p> <p>Training sessions teaching educators how to use the Essential Skills as an organizer to recognize learning</p> | <p>Ministry staff continued to check for completed training plans that organized learning using level descriptions and educator/learner statements</p> <p>Checklists and rubrics using level descriptions or matrix statements attached to sample work in portfolio</p> <p>Use of demonstrations; but content and form was not mandated</p> <p>Mandated integration of Essential Skills levels into the training plans and checklists/rubrics attached to sample work in portfolio</p> |
| Ontario Adult Literacy Curriculum Framework, 2011 | |
| <p>A service plan for LBS that is incorporated into a provincial database and client management system that has elements common to all EO service providers with some specific LBS elements; no modifications can be made to the service plan structure; however programs can create their own program learner plans with information that is collected for the provincial system</p> <p>Competencies, task groups and level statements from the OALCF curriculum framework document</p> <p>Use of four different assessment devices:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Milestones to measure learner progress 2. Culminating Tasks to measure goal completion 3. International literacy survey score (assessment tool TBD) to measure learner gains 4. Transition assessments chosen by program to indicate readiness to move into next step (e.g., entrance test for secondary or post-secondary program) | <p>Mandatory use of competency statements (i.e. competencies and task groups) in the learner plans in order to register a student</p> <p>Mandatory completion of Milestones for 60% of learners in order to show progress; used for funding allocation</p> <p>Mandatory use of one culminating task to show goal completion; will be used for funding allocation</p> <p>Eventual mandatory use of a learner gains assessment; will be used for funding allocation</p> |

Appendix 4: EOIS-CaMS Data Collection Questions

Table 21: Numbers and Rates of OALCF Milestones In Progress and Completed for 2013-2014

| Milestone | In Progress | | Completed | |
|-----------|-------------|------------|-----------|------------|
| | Number | Percentage | Number | Percentage |
| 1 | 268 | 6.5% | 2281 | 3.4% |
| 2 | 53 | 1.3% | 1357 | 2.0% |
| 3 | 123 | 3.0% | 1158 | 1.7% |
| 4 | 81 | 2.0% | 2134 | 3.2% |
| 5 | 19 | 0.5% | 242 | 0.4% |
| 6 | 39 | 0.9% | 501 | 0.8% |
| 7 | 86 | 2.1% | 1618 | 2.4% |
| 8 | 84 | 2.0% | 1015 | 1.5% |
| 9 | 22 | 0.5% | 676 | 1.0% |
| 10 | 33 | 0.8% | 547 | 0.8% |
| 11 | 76 | 1.8% | 1454 | 2.2% |
| 12 | 21 | 0.5% | 224 | 0.3% |
| 13 | 20 | 0.5% | 662 | 1.0% |
| 14 | 43 | 1.0% | 1403 | 2.1% |
| 15 | 73 | 1.8% | 1216 | 1.8% |
| 16 | 39 | 0.9% | 719 | 1.1% |
| 17 | 48 | 1.2% | 692 | 1.0% |
| 18 | 84 | 2.0% | 894 | 1.3% |
| 19 | 66 | 1.6% | 846 | 1.3% |
| 20 | 119 | 2.9% | 424 | 0.6% |
| 21 | 40 | 1.0% | 385 | 0.6% |
| 22 | 48 | 1.2% | 558 | 0.8% |

| | | | | |
|----|-----|------|------|------|
| 23 | 80 | 1.9% | 1570 | 2.4% |
| 24 | 15 | 0.4% | 189 | 0.3% |
| 25 | 49 | 1.2% | 510 | 0.8% |
| 26 | 84 | 2.0% | 1051 | 1.6% |
| 27 | 98 | 2.4% | 1555 | 2.3% |
| 28 | 25 | 0.6% | 566 | 0.8% |
| 29 | 45 | 1.1% | 1397 | 2.1% |
| 30 | 13 | 0.3% | 283 | 0.4% |
| 31 | 6 | 0.1% | 73 | 0.1% |
| 32 | 4 | 0.1% | 344 | 0.5% |
| 33 | 4 | 0.1% | 2014 | 3.0% |
| 34 | 2 | 0.0% | 37 | 0.1% |
| 35 | 10 | 0.2% | 426 | 0.6% |
| 36 | 37 | 0.9% | 723 | 1.1% |
| 37 | 358 | 8.7% | 3459 | 5.2% |
| 38 | 76 | 1.8% | 1011 | 1.5% |
| 39 | 72 | 1.7% | 1985 | 3.0% |
| 40 | 13 | 0.3% | 439 | 0.7% |
| 41 | 40 | 1.0% | 1253 | 1.9% |
| 42 | 22 | 0.5% | 540 | 0.8% |
| 43 | 9 | 0.2% | 351 | 0.5% |
| 44 | 1 | 0.0% | 169 | 0.3% |
| 45 | 63 | 1.5% | 1390 | 2.1% |
| 46 | 42 | 1.0% | 748 | 1.1% |
| 47 | 44 | 1.1% | 1097 | 1.6% |
| 48 | 29 | 0.7% | 802 | 1.2% |

| | | | | |
|-------|------|-------|-------|-------|
| 49 | 18 | 0.4% | 347 | 0.5% |
| 50 | 17 | 0.4% | 178 | 0.3% |
| 51 | 30 | 0.7% | 693 | 1.0% |
| 52 | 18 | 0.4% | 795 | 1.2% |
| 53 | 39 | 0.9% | 335 | 0.5% |
| 54 | 162 | 3.9% | 7866 | 11.8% |
| 55 | 137 | 3.3% | 3672 | 5.5% |
| 56 | 41 | 1.0% | 1244 | 1.9% |
| 57 | 765 | 18.5% | 3553 | 5.3% |
| 58 | 74 | 1.8% | 1063 | 1.6% |
| 59 | 16 | 0.4% | 665 | 1.0% |
| 60 | 89 | 2.2% | 1376 | 2.1% |
| TOTAL | 4132 | 100% | 66775 | 100% |

Table 22: Numbers and Rates of French Milestones In Progress and Completed in 2013-2014

| Milestone | In Progress | | Completed | |
|-----------|-------------|------------|-----------|------------|
| | Number | Percentage | Number | Percentage |
| 1 | 42 | 9.6% | 195 | 4.2% |
| 2 | 4 | 0.9% | 143 | 3.1% |
| 3 | 28 | 6.4% | 116 | 2.5% |
| 4 | 12 | 2.7% | 173 | 3.7% |
| 5 | 1 | 0.2% | 6 | 0.1% |
| 6 | 2 | 0.5% | 6 | 0.1% |
| 7 | 6 | 1.4% | 51 | 1.1% |
| 8 | 6 | 1.4% | 81 | 1.7% |
| 9 | 4 | 0.9% | 94 | 2.0% |
| 10 | 9 | 2.1% | 26 | 0.6% |
| 11 | 20 | 4.6% | 168 | 3.6% |
| 12 | 3 | 0.7% | 14 | 0.3% |
| 13 | 3 | 0.7% | 40 | 0.9% |
| 14 | 1 | 0.2% | 47 | 1.0% |
| 15 | 8 | 1.8% | 186 | 4.0% |
| 16 | 12 | 2.7% | 147 | 3.1% |
| 17 | 12 | 2.7% | 91 | 1.9% |
| 18 | 1 | 0.2% | 75 | 1.6% |
| 19 | 3 | 0.7% | 53 | 1.1% |
| 20 | 12 | 2.7% | 31 | 0.7% |
| 21 | 9 | 2.1% | 55 | 1.2% |

| | | | | |
|----|----|------|-----|------|
| 22 | 5 | 1.1% | 43 | 0.9% |
| 23 | 7 | 1.6% | 92 | 2.0% |
| 24 | 1 | 0.2% | 13 | 0.3% |
| 25 | 5 | 1.1% | 21 | 0.4% |
| 26 | 6 | 1.4% | 86 | 1.8% |
| 27 | 19 | 4.3% | 142 | 3.0% |
| 28 | 6 | 1.4% | 88 | 1.9% |
| 29 | 9 | 2.1% | 117 | 2.5% |
| 30 | 3 | 0.7% | 22 | 0.5% |
| 31 | 1 | 0.2% | 32 | 0.7% |
| 32 | | 0.0% | 16 | 0.3% |
| 33 | | 0.0% | 4 | 0.1% |
| 34 | 1 | 0.2% | 4 | 0.1% |
| 35 | 1 | 0.2% | 7 | 0.1% |
| 36 | 9 | 2.1% | 94 | 2.0% |
| 37 | 22 | 5.0% | 198 | 4.2% |
| 38 | 2 | 0.5% | 47 | 1.0% |
| 39 | 5 | 1.1% | 96 | 2.1% |
| 40 | 6 | 1.4% | 34 | 0.7% |
| 41 | 6 | 1.4% | 26 | 0.6% |
| 42 | 1 | 0.2% | 10 | 0.2% |
| 43 | 2 | 0.5% | 39 | 0.8% |
| 44 | | 0.0% | 1 | 0.0% |
| 45 | 8 | 1.8% | 93 | 2.0% |
| 46 | 2 | 0.5% | 71 | 1.5% |
| 47 | 4 | 0.9% | 57 | 1.2% |

| | | | | |
|-------|-----|------|------|-------|
| 48 | | 0.0% | 45 | 1.0% |
| 49 | 1 | 0.2% | 12 | 0.3% |
| 50 | 2 | 0.5% | 16 | 0.3% |
| 51 | 4 | 0.9% | 87 | 1.9% |
| 52 | 8 | 1.8% | 77 | 1.6% |
| 53 | 6 | 1.4% | 25 | 0.5% |
| 54 | 28 | 6.4% | 593 | 12.7% |
| 55 | 33 | 7.5% | 294 | 6.3% |
| 56 | 2 | 0.5% | 130 | 2.8% |
| 57 | 6 | 1.4% | 37 | 0.8% |
| 58 | 11 | 2.5% | 24 | 0.5% |
| 59 | 3 | 0.7% | 23 | 0.5% |
| 60 | 5 | 1.1% | 63 | 1.3% |
| TOTAL | 438 | 100% | 4677 | 100% |

Table 23: Numbers and Rates of Use Digital Technology Milestones by Learner Groups

| Learner Sub-Groups | Milestone 54 | | | | Milestone 55 | | | | Milestone 56 | | | |
|-------------------------|--------------|-------|-----------|-------|--------------|-------|-----------|-------|--------------|-------|-----------|-------|
| | In Progress | | Completed | | In Progress | | Completed | | In Progress | | Completed | |
| | # | % | # | % | # | % | # | % | # | % | # | % |
| Anglophone | 122 | 75.3% | 6963 | 88.5% | 91 | 66.4% | 3277 | 89.2% | 30 | 73.2% | 1079 | 86.7% |
| Deaf learners | 6 | 3.7% | 65 | 0.8% | 5 | 3.6% | 33 | 0.9% | 1 | 2.4% | 4 | 0.3% |
| Native learners | 6 | 3.7% | 245 | 3.1% | 8 | 5.8% | 68 | 1.9% | 8 | 19.5% | 31 | 2.5% |
| Francophone | 28 | 17.3% | 593 | 7.6% | 33 | 24.2% | 294 | 8% | 2 | 4.9% | 130 | 10.5% |
| Community-based | 84 | 51.9% | 2816 | 35.8% | 72 | 52.6% | 1291 | 35.2% | 23 | 56.1% | 407 | 32.7% |
| College | 41 | 25.3% | 3327 | 42.3% | 9 | 6.6% | 1282 | 34.9% | 13 | 31.7% | 434 | 34.9% |
| School board | 37 | 22.8% | 1723 | 21.9% | 56 | 40.9% | 1099 | 29.9% | 5 | 12.2% | 403 | 32.4% |
| Grade 0-8 | 54 | 33.3% | 1082 | 13.8% | 32 | 23.4% | 339 | 9.2% | 4 | 9.8% | 66 | 5.3% |
| Grade 9 | 22 | 13.6% | 674 | 8.6% | 15 | 10.9% | 272 | 7.4% | 4 | 9.8% | 76 | 6.1% |
| Grade 10 | 20 | 12.3% | 1009 | 12.8% | 16 | 11.7% | 467 | 12.7% | 8 | 19.5% | 110 | 8.8% |
| Grade 11 | 12 | 7.4% | 858 | 10.9% | 11 | 8.0% | 369 | 10.0% | 6 | 14.6% | 127 | 10.2% |
| Grade 12 | 18 | 11.1% | 2243 | 28.5% | 31 | 22.6% | 1175 | 32.0% | 5 | 12.2% | 415 | 33.4% |
| Apprenticeship | 2 | 1.2% | 362 | 4.6% | 5 | 3.6% | 166 | 4.5% | 2 | 4.9% | 21 | 1.7% |
| Employment | 46 | 28.4% | 2591 | 32.9% | 58 | 42.3% | 1383 | 37.7% | 16 | 39.0% | 587 | 47.2% |
| Independence | 50 | 30.9% | 1217 | 15.5% | 41 | 29.9% | 717 | 19.5% | 7 | 17.1% | 186 | 15.0% |
| Postsecondary | 41 | 25.3% | 3001 | 38.2% | 17 | 12.4% | 1087 | 29.6% | 10 | 24.4% | 369 | 29.7% |
| Secondary School Credit | 23 | 14.2% | 695 | 8.8% | 16 | 11.7% | 319 | 8.7% | 6 | 14.6% | 81 | 6.5% |

Appendix 5: Assessor Survey

Assessment Practices and the Digital Technology Milestones

Introduction and Consent

[français](#)

AlphaPlus is coordinating a research project to examine current assessment practices related to the OALCF Use Digital Technology Milestones, the alignment between them and program learning and reporting trends. This survey is one of the ways that we are collecting information. We will also visit programs and examine data from EOIS-CaMS. The survey has four sections:

- A. Background Information**
- B. Work Responsibilities and Practices**
- C. Milestone Selection**
- D. Milestones and Learning**

The survey should take approximately 15-20 minutes to complete.

1. How will we use the results from the study?

A key outcome of the study is the development of a series of assessment practice scenarios to exemplify and illustrate practices currently employed in programs. In addition, research briefs will be developed to present key findings from the study. All products will be available to programs on the AlphaPlus website.

2. How will we protect your privacy?

Your participation in this survey is voluntary. If you are not comfortable answering a question, you can choose not to answer it. You will not be asked to identify yourself or your program unless you chose to do so in order to participate in a follow-up interview. If you do decide to participate in a follow-up interview, all individual responses will remain confidential. We will not attribute any of your responses to you or your program. Your interview will not be connected to your survey responses. Only Alpha Plus researchers will have access to the survey and follow-up data.

If you have any questions or comments about this survey please contact:

Matthias Sturm
AlphaPlus
416-322-1012 x 256
msturm@alphaplus.ca

Do you agree to take part in this survey and have your responses included in the final report?

- Yes
- No

Introduction and Consent

Assessment Practices and the Digital Technology Milestones

Are you responsible for entering the information about Milestones in EOIS/CaMS?

- Yes
- No

Whether you are responsible or not do you administer the Milestones?

- Yes
- No

If you checked No to the last question please have the person who administers the Milestones in your program complete the survey, even if they are not responsible for entering the information in EOIS-CaMS.

A. Background Information

The questions in this section are about your program, learners and your work. Your answers will remain anonymous and confidential and will be used to group your survey responses with others.

What type of service provider do you work with?

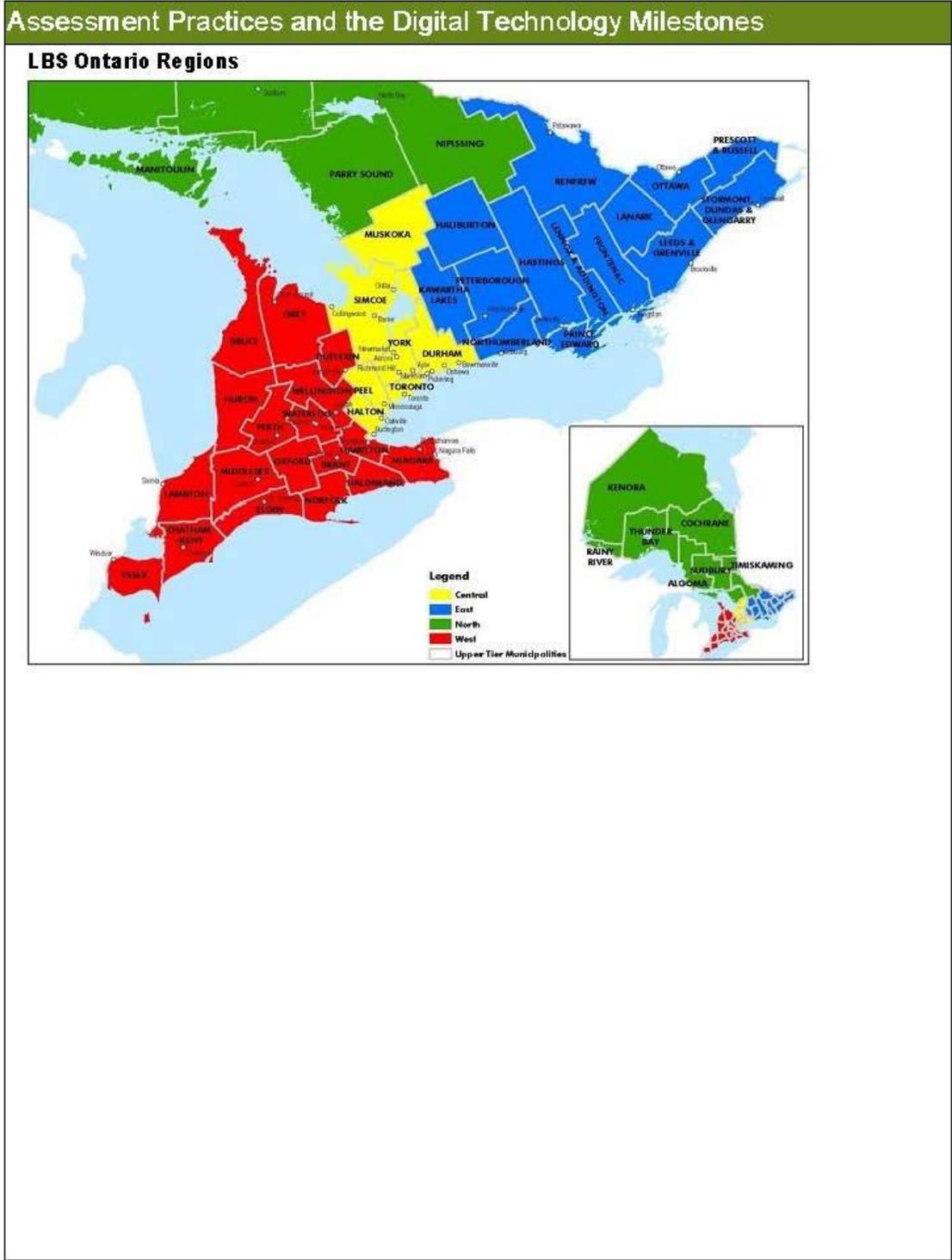
- School Board
- Community College
- Community-based Delivery Program
- Other (specify)

What are the main streams or cultural groups your agency works with?

- English (Anglophone)
- Aboriginal (Native)
- Deaf and Deaf/Blind
- French (Francophone)
- Other (specify)

What region of Ontario are you in?

- Central
- East
- North
- West



Assessment Practices and the Digital Technology Milestones

Please identify your LBS regional network and/or support organisation

- LITERACY LINK NIAGARA
- ESSENTIAL SKILLS ONTARIO (ESO) - formerly ONTARIO LITERACY COALITION (OLC)
- LITERACY NETWORK OF DURHAM REGION
- LITERACY ONTARIO CENTRAL SOUTH REGION LITERACY NETWORK (LOCS)
- QUALITY IN LIFELONG LEARNING NETWORK (QUILL)
- NORTHWESTERN ONTARIO LITERACY NETWORK
- LITERACY LINK EASTERN ONTARIO
- METRO TORONTO MOVEMENT FOR LITERACY/LE RASSEMBLEMENT POUR L'ALPHABÉTISATION DE LA COMMUNAUTÉ URBAINE
- ADULT BASIC EDUCATION ASSOCIATION OF HAMILTON-WENTWORTH
- OTTAWA COMMUNITY COALITION FOR LITERACY
- TRI-COUNTY LITERACY NETWORK
- SIMCOE/MUSKOKA LITERACY NETWORK
- PROJECT READ LITERACY NETWORK WATERLOO-WELLINGTON
- LITERACY LINK SOUTH CENTRAL
- MID NORTH NETWORK FOR THE COORDINATION AND DEVELOPMENT OF ADULT LEARNING
- PEEL-HALTON-DUFFERIN ADULT LEARNING NETWORK
- LITERACY NETWORK NORTHEAST
- DEAF LITERACY INITIATIVE (DLI)
- CENTRE FRANCO-ONTARIEN DES RESSOURCES EN ALPHABÉTISATION (SUDBURY)
- COMMUNITY LITERACY OF ONTARIO (CLO)
- ONTARIO NATIVE LITERACY COALITION (ONLC)
- COLLEGE SECTOR COMMITTEE FOR ADULT UPGRADING (CSC)
- COALITION ONTARIENNE DE FORMATION DES ADULTES (COFA)
- NINGWAKWE LEARNING PRESS
- LAUBACH LITERACY ONTARIO
- CESBA (ONT. ASSOC. OF ADULT & CONTINUING EDUC. SCHOOL BOARD ADMIN.)
- CONTACT NORTH/CONTACT NORD
- OTHER (SPECIFY)

A. Background Information

Assessment Practices and the Digital Technology Milestones

What is the main method of program delivery for the majority of learners?

- One-to-one
- Small groups (2-8)
- Medium size groups (9-15)
- Large groups or classes (15+)
- Independent study (e.g., e-learning, correspondence)
- Other (specify)

How old are most learners in your program? Check all that apply.

- 19 years of age and under
- 20-29 years of age
- 30-44 years of age
- 45-64 years of age
- 65 years of age and over

What is (are) the most common level(s) of education of most learners in your program?

Check all that apply.

- Elementary school
- Some high school
- A completed high school education (in Canada or elsewhere)
- More than a high school education
- A modified high school education (e.g., learners with developmental challenges)
- Other (specify)

Assessment Practices and the Digital Technology Milestones

What do most of your learners say they want to work on in your program (these reasons may or may not align with the five goal paths)? Check all that apply.

- Academic learning for secondary credit, GED, postsecondary and apprenticeship, etc.
- Community related learning to better understand and access various services, to learn more about the local community, to support people in the community, etc.
- Employment related learning for a job, a better job, to meet a new job requirement, to start a business, etc.
- Family related learning to support children at school and other family members, etc.
- Personal learning to gain a certificate or licence (e.g., boating, hunting, driving), pass a non-academic test, to address personal concerns and interests, etc.
- Other (specify)

A. Background Information

What is your work arrangement?

- Volunteer
- Permanent, salaried employee
- Long-term contract employee
- Short-term contract employee
- Other (specify)

What are your regularly scheduled weekly work hours (include all types of work in addition to Milestone administration)?

- 1-10 hours per week
- 11-20 hours per week
- 21-30 hours per week
- 31-35 hours per week
- 36+ hours per week

Assessment Practices and the Digital Technology Milestones

How many years of experience do you have working in adult literacy programs (LBS and other)?

- Less than 2 years
- 2-4 years
- 5-9 years
- 10-14 years
- 15-20 years
- More than 20

B. Work Responsibilities and Practices

These questions are about your regular work responsibilities and practices, and include administration of the Milestones and many other possible responsibilities and practices.

| Assessment Practices and the Digital Technology Milestones | | | | | |
|---|-------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------|
| If a responsibility is not relevant to your situation, please mark "Not applicable to me". | | | | | |
| If the responsibility is relevant, please rate how you feel about the amount of time you generally have to accomplish this work. | | | | | |
| | Not applicable to me | Absolutely no time | Barely enough time | Enough time | More than enough time |
| Registration and intake | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Teaching and training with learners | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Learner support and referrals | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Staff and/or volunteer supervision and support | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Program administration and reporting (related to EOIS-CaMS and other databases) | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Program planning and curriculum development | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Participating in or facilitating staff training related to the OALCF and/or EOIS-CaMS | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Participating in or facilitating staff training to support overall professional development | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Program development, partnership development and outreach | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Assessment (administration of Milestones) | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Assessment (administration of additional | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

| Assessment Practices and the Digital Technology Milestones | | | | | |
|---|--|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| assessments) | | | | | |
| Other | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Other (specify) | <input type="text"/> | | | | |
| B. Work Responsibilities and Practices | | | | | |
| Do you use additional assessments? | | | | | |
| <input type="radio"/> | Yes | | | | |
| <input type="radio"/> | No | | | | |
| What additional assessments do you use? Check all that apply. | | | | | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | CAAT – Canadian Adult Achievement Test | | | | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | CABS – Common Assessment of Basic Skills | | | | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | CARA – Canadian Adult Reading Assessment | | | | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | CAMERA - Communications and Math Employment Readiness Assessment | | | | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | CLB – Canadian Language Benchmarks assessments | | | | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | PDQ – Prose, Document, Quantitative | | | | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | TOWES – Test of Workplace Essential Skills | | | | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Program developed | | | | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Other (specify) | | | | |
| | <input type="text"/> | | | | |
| Why do you use additional assessments? | | | | | |
| | <input type="text"/> | | | | |
| B. Work Responsibilities and Practices | | | | | |
| Do you use other curriculum frameworks and curriculum support documents in addition to the OALCF Curriculum Framework? | | | | | |
| <input type="radio"/> | Yes | | | | |
| <input type="radio"/> | No | | | | |

Assessment Practices and the Digital Technology Milestones

What other curriculum frameworks and curriculum support documents do you use?

Check all that apply.

- Ministry of Education Secondary Curriculum and related documents
- Ministry of Education Elementary Curriculum and related documents
- LBS Level Descriptions Manual
- LBS Matrix
- An adult literacy framework from a different province
- An adult literacy framework from a different country
- The Canadian Language Benchmarks
- The Canadian Language Benchmarks for Literacy Learners
- ACE curriculum
- OALCF curriculum support documents (e.g., ESKARGO)
- Other (please specify)

Why do you use other curriculum frameworks and support documents?

C. Milestone Selection

The third section is about procedures you use and decisions you make when selecting Milestones for learner plans.

| Assessment Practices and the Digital Technology Milestones | | | | | |
|--|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| For each of the following possible procedures and decisions, please rate how often you generally follow this procedure or make this decision. | | | | | |
| | Never | Occasionally | Half of the time | Most of the time | Always |
| I select Milestones based on learner interests and reasons for being in the program | <input type="radio"/> |
| Milestones are pre-selected for learner/service plans based on our program's courses (e.g. PLAR preparation or ACE) | <input type="radio"/> |
| Learners are involved in Milestone selection | <input type="radio"/> |
| I select Milestones at lower levels than an initial assessment indicates in order to show progress | <input type="radio"/> |
| I select Milestones at intake in order to open a learner/service plan as soon as possible | <input type="radio"/> |
| I select Milestones as soon as I know a learner is about to exit | <input type="radio"/> |
| I select Milestones that I know learners can complete regardless of goal path and learner interests | <input type="radio"/> |
| I change Milestone selections if the learners' goals change | <input type="radio"/> |
| I change Milestone selections if they are too difficult | <input type="radio"/> |
| I change sub-goals if the Milestones are too difficult | <input type="radio"/> |

Assessment Practices and the Digital Technology Milestones

I select the same Milestones regardless of goal path and learner interests because I know most learners will be able to complete them

I select Use Digital Technology Milestones

Comments on Milestone selection and possible challenges

C. Milestone Selection

If you selected Use Digital Technology Milestones "Most of the time" or "Always" or "Half of the time", please respond to the following question.

Why do you select Use Digital Technology Milestones "Most of the time" or "Always" or "Half of the time"? Check all that apply.

- They are related to learners' goals
- Most learners can complete them
- They take little or no preparation to complete
- Learners' abilities to complete them are predictable
- They do not directly assess reading, writing and math abilities
- They are the best way to ensure all learners have one complete Milestone on their learner plans
- Other (please specify)

Comments

D. Milestones and Learning

The final section is about Milestones in general and Use Digital Technology Milestones in particular, and the information they provide to support learning activities and programming.

| Assessment Practices and the Digital Technology Milestones | | | | | |
|---|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| For each of the following statements about the information that Use Digital Technology Milestones provide, please rate whether you “Agree”, “Somewhat agree”, “Somewhat disagree” or “Disagree” about the information that Milestones can provide. If you have no opinion or are unsure, please select “Not sure”. | | | | | |
| | Not sure | Agree | Somewhat agree | Somewhat disagree | Disagree |
| The successful completion of Use Digital Technology Milestones tells me that learners will be able to do the same activity (e.g., login to an account) at the same level of difficulty in their daily lives | <input type="radio"/> |
| The successful completion of Use Digital Technology Milestones tells me that learners have gained skills and knowledge related to their goal and transition readiness | <input type="radio"/> |
| The successful completion of Use Digital Technology Milestones tells me that learners have acquired particular digital technology skills and knowledge | <input type="radio"/> |
| The successful completion of Use Digital Technology Milestones tells me that learners are simply able to complete the Milestone | <input type="radio"/> |
| The successful completion of Use Digital Technology | <input type="radio"/> |

| Assessment Practices and the Digital Technology Milestones | | | | | |
|---|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Milestones tells me that learners have developed test-taking skills and knowledge | | | | | |
| D. Milestones and Learning | | | | | |
| <p>For each of the following statements about the information that all other Milestones provide, please rate whether you “Agree”, “Somewhat agree”, “Somewhat disagree” or “Disagree” about the information that Milestones can provide. If you have no opinion or are unsure, please select “Not sure”.</p> | | | | | |
| | Not sure | Agree | Somewhat agree | Somewhat disagree | Disagree |
| The successful completion of Milestones tells me that learners are ready to progress to the next level in the task group/competency | <input type="radio"/> |
| The successful completion of Milestones tells me that learners will be able to do the same activity (e.g., refer to a course guide) at the same level of difficulty in their daily lives | <input type="radio"/> |
| The successful completion of Milestones tells me that learners have gained skills and knowledge related to the reasons they have for being in the program | <input type="radio"/> |
| The successful completion of Milestones tells me that learners have acquired particular reading, writing and | <input type="radio"/> |

Assessment Practices and the Digital Technology Milestones

math related skills and knowledge

The successful completion of Milestones tells me that learners are simply able to complete the Milestone

The successful completion of Milestones tells me that learners have developed test-taking skills and knowledge

Comments about Milestones and learning including Use Digital Technology Milestones

Participation in Project Evaluation

Would you be willing to participate in a follow-up survey and interview in order to provide feedback on key deliverables related to this project?

- Yes
- No

Participation in Project Evaluation

Please provide your contact information or send an email to msturm@alphaplus.ca

Name:

Organization:

Email:

Participation in Project Evaluation

Assessment Practices and the Digital Technology Milestones

Please indicate why not

- I simply don't have the time
- I'm tired of being asked to participate in OALCF related evaluations and reviews
- I don't want to reveal my contact information
- I worry that if I reveal my contact information, it may impact our program funding agreement with TCU
- Other (specify)

Appendix 6: Study Overview and Invitation to Participate



AlphaPlus is coordinating a research project called *Assessment Use and Reporting: Investigating Data Integrity Issues*. The aim of the research is to examine current assessment practices related to the OALCF Digital Technology (DT) Milestones, the alignment between the DT Milestones and program learning and DT reporting trends.

Preliminary EOIS-CaMs data and anecdotal information indicates that the OALCF Competency D – Use Digital Technology Milestones are being selected at high rates. We would like to dig deeper and find out why this may be occurring. A key outcome of the study is the development of a series of assessment practice scenarios to exemplify good practices currently employed in programs. In addition, research briefs will be developed to present key findings from the study. All products will be available to programs on the AlphaPlus website.

Guiding the aims of the research project and all data collection is the following over-arching research question and related support questions:

- How and when are Digital Technology Milestones used with learners?
- What are the decision-making processes and considerations made by assessors when using the OALCF Digital Technology Milestones?
 - How do their decisions and considerations align or not align with the stated uses of the OALCF Milestones?
 - How do the OALCF Digital Technology Milestones inform learner goals and program learning approaches?

We will collect different kinds of data using an online survey, key stakeholder interviews and EOIS-CaMS data. A key part of the data is the information we receive directly from program assessors during visits to their programs. We also hope to talk to learners during these visits, if that can be arranged.

The interviews will be open and conversational so that we can better understand the day-to-day experiences of assessors and learners as they relate to the use of the OALCF Milestones. All identifying information (i.e. people's names, program names and locations) will be anonymous, and will remain strictly confidential. Only AlphaPlus researchers will have access to the identifying information. Both the researchers and participants will sign consent forms that outline confidentiality and privacy protocols, in addition to the rights of research participants.

We hope you are able to participate. Your insights and the insights of your learners are integral to the project. To recognize your participation efforts, we are able to provide a small (\$250) honorarium for your program. For more information, please contact Matthias Sturm at AlphaPlus (extension 256).

AlphaPlus Researchers

Christine Pinsent-Johnson and Matthias Sturm

Appendix 7: Interview Guide

The interviews will touch on the same topics developed for the survey but in an open and conversational manner. We also want to hear your reactions and thoughts about the survey.

A. Background Information

B. Work Responsibilities and Practices

C. Milestone Selection

D. Milestones and Learning

A. Background Information

- Collect and record information related to the following:
- Program location, sector, stream, size and main delivery format
- Assessor's experience, work arrangement and regular work hours

B. Work Responsibilities and Practices

1. How did the interviewee take on the MS administration responsibilities?
2. How did he/she learn how to administer the MS?
 - a. Who (position) in your organization was trained by MTCU? Is this the same person who administers the Milestones?
 - b. If not the same person: Have there been any challenges in training assessors and assuring consistency in the way Milestones are administered?
3. How does he/she get updates about the process or who does he/she talk to in order to gain additional information and insights?
4. Does the assessor have any questions or confusions about the processes related to selection and reporting that have remained unanswered?

C. Milestone Selection

1. How/why does the assessor select certain MS? How/why does the assessor select digital technology Milestones?
 - How did he/she develop this process?
 - Did he/she develop this process with any other input?
 - Are selections related to learner goals, including DT goals?
 - What works well? What doesn't work well? What would the assessor like to see changed?
 - Share top 10 list of commonly selected MS and discuss whether or not there are similarities and differences; emphasize that these are provincial and may not reflect this particular program.
2. What does the assessor do to ensure that MS assessment practices lead to required reporting targets?

- Are others in the same network doing things in a similar or different way?
 - What are the implications of these different practices?
 - Do you open a plan w/out selecting a milestone?
3. How do you know when a learner is ready to complete a MS? A digital technology Milestone?
 4. What are possible reasons why a learner may not complete a Milestone that was selected?
 5. What happens when learners are unable to complete a MS?
 - Reporting implications?
 - Registration implications?
 6. Does it happen that learners have already completed all applicable goal-related MS when they enter the program?
 - Did they complete them with another LBS program that the learner was referred from?
 7. Do you use MS to document already existing knowledge and skills of a learner?
 8. Does it happen that there are simply no applicable MS for learners to complete?
 - If yes: Is it because there aren't any MS that fit a learner's service plan?
 - Are there specific DT MS activities that could be developed to support your program?

D. Milestones and Learning

1. What do assessors believe MS completion tells stakeholders?
 - Learners?
 - Other LBS programs and colleagues?
 - EO partners?
 - Educational partners?
 - Employment partners?
 - Community partners?
 - Program funder (MTCU)?
2. How do you communicate the role of MS to learners? How do your learners view MS?
3. Do you use the MS results to inform future learning? How?
4. What additional assessment tools and curriculum resources do you use? How? Why? How do they work with the OALCF and Milestones?
 - Share survey results about assessment use
5. Where do you go for support on using the OALCF (i.e. colleagues, regional network, sectoral/stream network)?
 - What has been most helpful?
 - What would be most helpful in the future?

Appendix 8: Confidentiality and Consent Form



AlphaPlus is coordinating a SDNDF-funded research project called *Assessment Use and Reporting: Investigating Data Integrity Issues*. The aim of the research is to examine current assessment practices related to the OALCF Use Digital Technology (DT) Milestones, the alignment between the DT Milestones and program learning and DT reporting trends.

As part of our data collection, we will interview program staff who work with EOIS-CaMS and administer the Milestones to learners. The interviews will be open-ended and conversational so that we can better understand your day-to-day experiences and decision-making as they relate to the use of the OALCF Milestones. With your permission we may record the interviews and/or write notes.

All identifying information (i.e. people’s names, program names and locations) will be anonymous, and will remain strictly confidential. Only AlphaPlus researchers will have access to the identifying information. As an interview participant you have the right to not respond to particular questions. You also have the right to change your mind and not continue to participate in the interview. This decision will not affect the project, nor will it affect your professional relationship with AlphaPlus in any way.

It is possible that particular parts of the interview will appear as quotations in various publications such as a research report, a research brief and a series of assessment practice scenarios. If we use your quotations, we will not identify you or your program. We will make a general reference to your role (i.e. assessor, program manager, practitioner) and program (i.e. community-based or school board or college program).

Your insights are integral to the project. To recognize your participation efforts, we are able to provide a small (\$250) honorarium for your program.

If you have any questions or concerns about the researchers or the project, please contact Alan Cherwinski, Acting Executive Director of AlphaPlus at 416-322-1012 or 1-800-788-1120, ext. 103 or acherwinski@alphaplus.ca

| | |
|--|------------------|
| _____ | _____ |
| AlphaPlus Researchers Christine Pinsent-Johnson or Matthias Sturm | Participant |
| | Mailing address: |
| _____ | _____ |
| Date | _____ |
| | _____ |
| | _____ |