

Bridging the Gap



A Framework for Teaching and Transitioning Low Literacy Immigrant Youth

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Written by Monica Leong and Lynn Collins



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Bridging the Gap: A Framework for Teaching and Transitioning Low Literacy Immigrant Youth

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Project Coordinator, Bow Valley College

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Introduction

Welcome! This document is a framework for teaching and transitioning immigrant youth who have low literacy skills. However, before we go any further, we would like to say that although we are working with immigrant youth in our particular program, we believe this framework to be more broadly applicable to other target audiences, such as first language literacy programs, general literacy programs, and Aboriginal programs. After all, a program whose focus is on developing learners' literacy skills, learning strategies, and essential skills in order to successfully transition learners into further education can help any learner with literacy needs, not just those who are also English language learners. Learners with low literacy skills face many challenges in their attempts to succeed in educational and workplace settings. It is the aim of this framework to help you plan, implement, and evolve a program that will best support your learners as they meet and overcome these challenges.

This framework encapsulates the key elements of a successful transition program for young adult literacy learners who have exited high school but are still in need of focused literacy training in order to transition to further educational studies or workplace training. Our work with this target audience began in 2002 with a three-year pilot project offered at Bow Valley College, in Calgary, Alberta. The pilot project was called the Young Adult ESL Literacy Program and was funded by Alberta Employment, Immigration and Industry and Employment. In the first year of the project, we conducted a needs assessment to determine program needs and gaps for immigrant youth in Calgary. Below is a list of the key findings of the needs assessment:

1. There are very limited program choices for further education for young adult ESL (English as a second language) literacy learners. There are many workplace programs but not programs devoted to helping learners access further educational opportunities.
2. Programs need to be funded with a vision for sustainability, not merely short-term funding.
3. Transportation subsidies are needed to help learners access programs.

4. Learners need access to support workers and service agencies in the community.
5. There is a strong disconnect between learners' self-identified needs and their actual educational needs.
6. Small group instruction is key to the success of programs for young adult literacy learners.

At the time, there were no programs for young adult literacy learners which addressed all the issues identified in the needs assessment. Therefore, based on the key findings, we developed an instructional program for young adult literacy learners. Within a short time, working with small groups of learners, we were able to successfully transition learners on to further educational opportunities within the college or into career focused programs.

We believe that collaboration and good partnerships are a necessary part of successful programs. Therefore, in 2005, this project evolved into a partnership program with the Calgary Separate School District, and it continues to be run successfully at Bow Valley College as the Bridge Program, funded by Alberta Advanced Education and Technology. We now work closely with St. Anne Academic Centre in Calgary, one of the senior high schools in the Calgary Separate School District, and already this year several learners have successfully transitioned from the high school program into the college program. This partnership was awarded the 2007 Mayors' Excellence Award for Literacy Support and Enhancement. We have also partnered with Lethbridge College to pilot this framework and develop a program to serve young adult literacy learners in and around the Lethbridge area.

Since the inception of the Young Adult Literacy Program in 2002, we have focused on being highly responsive to learners' needs. We constantly scrutinise our practices, question what we do and why we do it, and solicit feedback from learners and instructors. We are also willing to try new methods and routines in the classroom to help us in our quest to provide the best educational environment for this group of learners. During the last four years we have undertaken comprehensive analyses of every aspect of our program and we have made changes to better serve our learners. These

changes have included modifying program outcomes, re-scheduling classes, creating new learner assessments, developing new curriculum content, and adapting the roles of those providing social support to learners, such as the student advisor and student support worker. These processes have allowed us to gradually evolve as a program into what we are today, and have meant that we have been able to continually improve what we have to offer learners while ensuring we provide the particular educational and social support they need in order to succeed.

Our experience with this target group has shown us that ESL literacy learners need post-high school learning opportunities that offer more exposure to the English language, more focused attention on reading and writing, more deliberate vocabulary building, and more direct instruction in learning strategies and essential skills. In addition, young adult ESL literacy learners struggle to transition from their familiar high school contexts to further educational or employment opportunities. A fear of the unknown, a lack of coping strategies, and an inability to access available resources are some of the barriers for these learners. Transitioning from the high school setting into other settings is often a challenge which proves too daunting to meet. These learners need access to programs that concentrate on the development of skills and strategies in order to allow them access to further educational or employment opportunities.

Since 2002 we have seen our program grow and develop in order to consistently meet the needs of learners, and everyone involved in the program has learned lessons along the way. Enrolment in the Bridge Program this year is at an all-time high, and we feel this is both a reflection of the work we have done to improve our program as well as an indication of the need for such programs. Statistics show alarming numbers of Canadians with literacy skills too low to effectively succeed in today's labour market. Given the magnitude of these numbers and the serious personal, social, and economic ramifications of low literacy skills, the need for transition programs such as ours is both clear and urgent. The target group we are serving is a growing one and their learning needs must be addressed so they can be productive members of society.

The experience and expertise we have gained over the last five years has allowed us to develop this framework, which will support and guide you as you plan and

implement your own transition program. We have spent a considerable amount of time researching in our field, and continue to strive to ensure that our research corroborates our practice, and vice versa. In our program, we have learned lessons through both research and practice, and this framework is a reflection of what we have learned. We hope that using this framework will enable you to help another group of young adult literacy learners to transition from the high school setting to the many post-high school opportunities that await them.

How to Use the Framework

The framework is a practical tool to help plan and implement a transition program for young adult ESL literacy learners or for your own identified target audience. The framework supports you and your team as you make the many decisions involved in beginning or evolving your program. It also offers insights from research and from our experiences in the Bridge Program at Bow Valley College since 2002. The framework offers the opportunity to not only learn about the best practices for transition programs for young adult ESL literacy learners, but also to apply these practices to your own setting and target audience.

You may be using the framework on your own or with a team of other stakeholders from your program. Either way, as you work through the framework, we encourage you to use a journal or other means to record your ideas and reflections. Remember that developing a program takes time and you may find that recording your ideas will help you remember them further on in the process. Consider how the concepts in the framework apply to your program, your learning environment, and your learners. Take time to ask other questions to help you and your team focus on your program's specific needs. Consider the framework a tool in your efforts to create the best possible program for your learners.

How the Framework is Organized

Learning from Research – A Review of the Literature

The framework begins with a literature review which discusses the levels of literacy across North America and details the findings of research in areas pertaining to young adult ESL literacy instruction and the transitioning of learners. It highlights in particular barriers to learning, the high rates of drop out, the need for social as well as learning support, the importance of engagement and motivation, the role of strategy instruction, and the benefits of project based learning. The findings of the research have been incorporated into the Bridge Program and into the recommendations of the framework to help you build and develop your own transition program.

The Three Stages of a Successful Transition Program

The Three Stages of a Successful Transition Program follows the literature review. One chapter is devoted to each of the following three stages:

- Identify and Recruit Learners
- Support and Retain Learners
- Teach and Transition Learners

Success Stories

Each chapter about the three stages begins with real success stories from the Bridge Program that illustrate the central concept of that stage. Learner names in the stories have been changed.

Action Areas

At the beginning of each stage, there is a list of the action areas that outline the key components of successful transition programs for young adult literacy learners. Following this list, each action area is broken down into action items for programs to

consider and address. Supporting information and practical advice follows each list of action items.

Building Relationships

Following the action areas, each stage contains a one-page section called Building Relationships in which we outline some ways that programs can build connections with various stakeholders, including high schools and school boards, community resources, the program's broader institution, other post-secondary institutions, and governments and funders. The Building Relationships sections include many examples of how programs can connect with different stakeholders, but the lists are not exhaustive. They are meant to help programs reflect on their interconnectedness within the community and encourage broader relationships-building as a valuable tool to help programs, and learners, thrive.

Tool Box

Each stage of the framework contains helpful samples and practical tools for programs to use and modify as necessary. These tools are found in a section called the Tool Box at the end of the chapters. A special Tool Box icon and coloured text box is found throughout the chapters to reference specific tools in the tool box. For example:



See the Tool Box at the end of this chapter for:

- Readiness Rubric

When this icon appears, it means that a tool exists in the Tool Box at the end of that chapter to help readers understand the concept in question and see what it might look like in action. The tools are exact or modified versions of tools used in the Bridge Program, so you can be sure that they have been tried and tested in real practice.

Glossary of Terms

At-Risk: In danger of dropping out of a program due to issues such as poverty, inadequate housing, or low self esteem.

Barriers: The obstacles that may prevent learners from accessing programs, such as transportation, employment, or childcare.

Basic Education: The level of courses completed before learners enter high school equivalent programs.

ESL: English as a Second Language. The acronym is used to describe programs that focus on teaching English to people whose first language is not English and those who attend such programs, e.g. ESL learners.

Essential Skills: Academic, employment, and generic occupational competencies such as oral communication, computer use, and working with others.

Learner-centred: A classroom environment which encourages learner participation at every level and builds upon learners' background, interests, and experiences.

Literacy: Reading, writing, and numeracy skills.

Low Literacy: Those who have insufficient reading, writing, and numeracy skills to achieve a high school diploma. In the context of this framework, those regarded as having low-literacy also demonstrate one or more of the following characteristics:

- Canadian Language Benchmarks reading and writing literacy levels Phase II or III
- Canadian Language Benchmarks listening and speaking proficiency levels 3-6
- Reading grade equivalency between grades 1-6
- Significantly higher proficiency in oral skills than written skills
- A low level of literacy skills in first language
- A low level of formal education or interrupted formal education in native country

- A lack of employability skills
- Little awareness of suitable post secondary educational opportunities

Outcomes: Program outcomes outline the key proficiencies in reading, writing, learning strategies, and essential skills which learners must accomplish.

Retain: In post-secondary environments, retaining learners has a positive connotation since it means that high-risk learners are staying in school rather than dropping out.

Thematic Units: Units of study that centre on achieving reading, writing, and learning strategy outcomes within broad topics, such as health, crime, and the environment.

Transition Programs: Programs that help learners transition from the high school setting, or a post-high school program, onto further post-secondary opportunities.

Upgrading: High school equivalent courses taken after successful completion of Basic Education.

Youth/Young Adult: Those people between the ages of eighteen and twenty five.

Learning from Research: A Review of the Literature

If a nation is to participate fully in today's global economy, its citizens must be literate. Without the necessary reading and writing skills, it becomes impossible for an individual to adequately cope with the demands of living and working in the twenty first century. Unfortunately, many people in our society today are lacking the necessary literacy skills to help them lead the successful, productive lives they desire. Statistics from research in both Canada and the USA indicate that within North America there are millions of citizens with low literacy skills. In Canada, forty-eight per cent of Canadian adults aged sixteen or over, around twelve million people, have low literacy. Within this twelve million, twenty per cent score at Level 1, the lowest proficiency level, and twenty eight per cent at Level 2. Looking specifically at Canadian youth, those aged sixteen to twenty five, over one third have Level 1 or Level 2 proficiency (ABC Canada Literacy Foundation, 2005).

Closer to home, although the three western provinces fare better than other regions of Canada, four out of ten people still fall into the low literacy range of Level 1 and Level 2 (ABC Canada Literacy Foundation, 2006). Numbers from the U.S. are no more encouraging: according to findings from the International Adult Literacy Survey, only half of the U.S. adult population actually reached Level 3 proficiency (Adult Education Facts, 2005). These statistics become even more disturbing when it is taken into account that a number of U.S. organisations have determined Level 3 literacy proficiency necessary as a minimum standard for success in today's labour market.

One third of Canadians aged 16-25 do not have the literacy proficiency necessary to succeed in today's labour market.

The statistics relating to immigrants also give serious cause for concern: about sixty per cent of immigrants in Canada have low literacy, compared to thirty seven per cent of native-born Canadians. Immigration is fundamental to the successful growth of Canada, and the future of the country will most certainly be influenced by the ability to

attract newcomers who can contribute positively to the nation's economic and social development (CIC, 2002).

Serious personal and economic implications exist relative to these low literacy levels. There are over two and a half million Canadians with low literacy who are either unemployed or employed in low-paying jobs, and these individuals are most at risk of losing their current jobs due to technological or organisational change (ABC Canada Literacy Foundation, 2005). In addition, those with low literacy are about twice as likely to be unemployed than those with higher level literacy skills. Interestingly, a rise of just one per cent in literacy scores relative to the international average is associated with an eventual two and a half per cent relative rise in labour productivity, and a one and a half per cent rise in Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per person (ABC Canada Literacy Foundation, 2006).

Statistics from the United States, presented by the Office of Vocational and Adult Education within the U.S. Department of Education, show that an adult without a high school diploma earns forty two per cent less than an adult with a diploma; low literacy skills cost business and taxpayers twenty billion U.S. dollars annually in lost wages, profits and productivity; and fifty per cent of the chronically unemployed are not functionally literate. In addition, forty one to forty four per cent of adults who scored in Level 1 on National Adult Literacy Survey (1992) were living in poverty, compared with four to six per cent of those who scored in the highest level (Meeder, n.d.).

There is a need for reform within every level of literacy instruction.

The literacy demands that today's adolescents will face in the future will far exceed what has been required in the past. Since many of these learners do not have the skills necessary to successfully negotiate the "Information Age" economy awaiting them (Meltzer, Smith & Clark, 2001), there is clearly a need for reform within every level of literacy instruction. In addition, projections show that by 2020, eighty five per cent of jobs will require some level of post-high school education (Bottoms, 2002); something impossible for an adult with low literacy to successfully achieve. It is also important to remember that those who fail to attain a literacy level that allows them to function in and

successfully contribute to society do not just “fade away”; they are amongst those most likely to rely on social assistance programs, become involved with crime and violence, and be inclined towards alcoholism and suicide (Van Ngo, 2001).

If a person is literate they have the ability to not only become informed, but also to make informed decisions (Meltzer et al., 2001). These are vital components of living in today’s society and yet ones that elude so many with low literacy. Unfortunately, literacy learners, especially young adult literacy learners, face a multitude of barriers that can prevent them from becoming truly informed in the way that Meltzer et al. suggest. These barriers include issues related to employment, health, finance, legal matters, and family or personal problems; they can also include the bureaucracy within education, such as program fees, waiting lists and unsuitable scheduling of classes (Dann-Messier & Kampits, 2004). Less than ten per cent of people in Canada who could benefit from a literacy program actually register, and studies suggest that barriers such as those mentioned above contribute to this statistic (ABC Canada Literacy Foundation, 2006).

Young adult literacy learners face a multitude of barriers to learning in addition to their low literacy skills.

For many people, barriers to successful learning begin to appear early in their education. A learner in need of literacy instruction may be left to “drift through high school, faking their way through reading assignments” (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2005). A large number of these students will find the demands of the classroom too great and decide to drop out of school all together. Roessingh and Kover (2002) have found that children born in Canada to immigrant parents and who speak their native language at home, or children who arrived in the country at an early age, often have difficulties developing the necessary literacy skills to compete academically with their native English speaking peers. As a result, it is common for ESL learners to drop out of the education system before finishing high school, with studies showing the dropout rate among young ESL learners considerably higher than that of their native English speaking peers (Watt & Roessingh, 2001).

The problems associated with drop out continue after high school. Canadian studies show that less than half of those who contact an organisation offering a literacy program actually enrol, and of those who enrol, around thirty per cent drop out (ABC Canada Literacy Foundation, 2006). In the U.S., evaluations of various youth service initiatives found dropout rates at around thirty to fifty per cent (Higgins, 1992). Weber (2004) points out that programs serving learners who have already dropped out of school once often fail to prevent them from dropping out a second time. In many cases, problems arise because programs are simply unable to cope with the array and seriousness of issues confronting learners (Department of Labor, 1992).

In an attempt to help learners overcome the many barriers to learning that face them, programs need to incorporate a social support component. Research shows that learners respond positively when they are provided with not only academic, but also social support (Dann-Messier & Kampits, 2004). One example of social support is the provision of child care. This type of support can be the deciding factor between a female learner attending a program or not. Often male learners outnumber female learners as a direct consequence of the lack of available child care.

Learners respond positively when they are provided with not only academic, but also social support.

Certain programs have recognised that if they were able to offer child care they would have more women enrolled in their classes (No longer for youth alone, 2004).

Support can also be given in the form of counselling. For example, reviewing the types and availability of financial aid with learners, and assisting in the completion of necessary documentation, can help calm learners' fears regarding the cost of their continuing education and give them the often vital financial support they need (Dann-Messier & Kampits, 2004). Weber (2004) comments on the necessity for programs to either offer sufficient support to address learners' academic and social needs themselves, or to have the means to connect learners to resources within the community.

Unfortunately, many programs are reluctant to develop a social service capacity and when they do, they often do not fully address the needs of learners. If a program places more importance on its schedule rather than its accessibility to learners, it limits

its own ability to reach out to learners (Porter, Cuban, Comings & Chase, 2005). Both instructors and administrators should endeavour to identify learners' particular barriers, develop relationships with community service providers, and ensure all available support networks are employed when the need arises. It may also be necessary for instructors to expand on their traditional role as educators and take on responsibilities more often connected with social workers or counsellors (Weber, 2004).

The approach taken in the classroom with this type of learner is a vital component to the success of any program. Learner engagement and motivation must become a fundamental element of instruction. If learners are to develop the necessary skills to competently use reading, writing, and speaking to learn, they need to be in environments which actively engage them (Meltzer & Hamann, 2004). Motivation and engagement play a key role in young adult learners' development of literacy skills (Meltzer et al., 2001; Meltzer & Hamann, 2004).

Equally, when students are not motivated to read and write, they do not use those skills to learn, and as a consequence are hindered in their development; this often leads to a "cycle of failure"

Motivation and engagement play a key role in young adult learners' development of literacy skills.

(Meltzer et al., 2001). When learners are engaged in their learning, they are actively involved in a search for meaningful information. This is often because they see an immediate connection between what they are doing in the classroom and their lives outside, and making that connection can help bring success to the whole learning experience. To facilitate this, instructors need to know about learners' interests and incorporate these interests into lessons wherever possible (Learning Point Associates, 2005).

A learner-centred classroom is also a key component of a successful program. This type of classroom is organised in such a way as to maximise all learners' opportunities for success (Meltzer & Hamann, 2005). If learners are active participants in the classroom this will improve not only learner engagement but also learner retention, and this will in turn have a positive effect on overall educational achievement (Weber, 2004). In addition, if learners understand the goal of their work, and feel that

they are, to a certain degree, in control over their learning, then they are more likely to persevere with tasks even when they feel challenged by what they are doing (Learning Point Associates, 2005).

In a learner-centred classroom, discussions are encouraged, the learners' background knowledge and experiences are honoured, and the instructor coaches and facilitates rather than lectures (Meltzer et al., 2001). Optimal learning environments such as this also take into account any disparity between the expectations of the program and the readiness of the learner, and make the necessary adjustments (Portnow, Popp, Broderick, Drago-Severson & Kegan, 1998).

Teaching in context is also very important. Research supports that when literacy skills are taught in context, rather than in isolation, learners are far more likely to be able to transfer the skills to other areas of their learning (Meltzer et al., 2001). There is also evidence that learning a second language is made easier when the content of the class is presented in a contextualised form, such as through thematic frameworks (Facella, Rampino & Shea, 2005). Within the classroom, instructors need to create ample opportunities for learners to practice material in various ways and contexts so that learners have the opportunity to properly assimilate what is being taught (Florez, 2001).

In addition to the above mentioned classroom approaches, the explicit teaching of strategies is also a key component to a successful program. Research indicates a relationship exists between adolescent literacy development and the frequent purposeful use of cognitive and metacognitive strategies (Meltzer et al., 2001). There also appears to be a connection between strategy use and motivation. Curtis (2002) notes that "intrinsic motivation seems to predict strategy use, and strategy use increases motivation".

Reading comprehension can be greatly enhanced through regular use of particular strategies before, during, and after reading (Meltzer et al., 2001). An important outcome of this approach is that learners who are better supported in their reading strategy use can go on to use reading to learn (Meltzer et al., 2001), a vital academic skill and yet one that often remains out of reach for literacy learners. Strategies can be

explicitly taught, and it is possible to teach those with low reading skills the strategies that better readers use (Meltzer & Hamann, 2005), thereby opening up a vast array of opportunities for even those reading at the most basic level.

Teaching reading is obviously a fundamental element of any literacy classroom. Studies show that time spent reading is positively correlated to learners' reading ability and with learners' engagement with reading (Curtis, 2002). In addition, if students have a purpose for reading, and they are in environments that encourage reading, it is likely they will become engaged readers (Meltzer et al., 2001). In this context, it is important to offer pleasure reading in addition to any prescribed texts. Pleasure reading can have the effect of being a "hook" into further reading and can encourage learners to feel that the program is "an oasis rather than a tax" on their time and energy (Cuban, 2001).

Both individual instructors and the program as a whole play an important role in encouraging learners to become more proficient readers. For example, instructors must ensure there is a plentiful supply and wide variety of reading material available to learners. They should expose learners to as many different and stimulating reading strategies as possible. And they should model their own reading habits to learners by bringing books to class with them and talking about what they are currently reading (Learning Point Associates, 2005). Programs must consider their instructional leadership, the background and experience of instructors, the types of learner assessment used, and the support services they offer as also being potential factors in the development of learners' reading skills (Alamprese, 2001).

A key approach in developing learners' skill sets is to offer project-based learning opportunities. Wrigley (1998) explains that project-based learning has much in common

Project-based learning is an effective way of teaching the life and literacy skills needed for entry into the workforce.

with participatory education, as it allows the curriculum to be developed in a way that directly relates to the lives of learners, and what is learned is used to help learners understand and negotiate their way in the world. She also points out that learners

involved in project-based learning often spend considerable amounts of time reading, editing, and commenting on their work, and that this motivation to produce quality work

is due in no small part to the fact that their audience is “real” rather than one within the classroom.

Project-based learning is not only an effective way of teaching, but also an excellent way to prepare learners for entry into the workforce. In the project-based classroom, learners have the opportunity to learn the skills associated with not only reading and writing, but also research, planning, brainstorming, and public speaking. Learners involved with a project tend to bond as a group, take on leadership roles, and learn the vital roles they can play within their communities (Johnson, 1998). In a society where employers are actively seeking employees who have people skills, teamwork skills, and problem-solving skills, project-based learning can be a valuable tool to help prepare learners for the twenty first century workplace (Wrigley, 1998). Although little research has been carried out with adult learners in project-based classes, there appears to be enough anecdotal evidence to support the view that project-based learning helps develop the skills necessary to succeed in high performing workplaces as highlighted by the U.S. Secretary of Labor’s Commission on Necessary Skills (SCANS) (Wrigley, 1998).

Learners often say that project-based learning gives them a greater awareness of their own abilities, confidence from being involved in a project from the start to a successful finish, and pride in gaining important knowledge along the way (Wrigley, 1998). Project-based learning has the potential to take learners into a world which might otherwise be closed to them. An example of this is given by Wrigley (1998) when she talks about a group of Cuban and Dominican women attending a program in New York who began to cook and share their food at lunch time as they could not afford the high prices charged by local restaurants. After some discussion and further research, this in-class project became a catering business for the wider community, with the women providing food for various social events. Obviously, not all project-based learning will have such dramatic results, but it always has the potential to give real-world meaning to what normally happens in the classroom (Gaer, 1998).

In the project-based classroom, the instructor becomes a resource, a facilitator, guiding learners as they decide the direction of their learning (Wrigley, 1998). As Gaer

(1998) comments, learners develop their skills through collaboration on a project that reaches out beyond the confines of the classroom. This creates not only excitement, but also a level of motivation not usually found in the traditional classroom. In Gaer's experience, project-based learning results in less teaching and more learning.

The way in which instructors interact with the learners in their class is a vital component of any program. As noted by Cummins, "Culturally diverse students are empowered or disabled as a direct result of their interactions with educators in schools," (as cited in Meltzer & Hamann, 2005). Instructors have a responsibility to create a classroom where learners feel safe and supported, and where those with different backgrounds and perspectives feel welcome; this encourages participation and contributes to learner success (Meltzer & Hamann, 2004). This is especially relevant for those with low literacy skills, as many of them have had negative educational experiences in the past. Feeling cared for by instructors really matters to many learners, and the power of this should not be underestimated (Meltzer & Hamann, 2004). This need for instructor involvement with learners on a more personal level is backed by research, which indicates that one of the most important contributing factors to learner success in high school is a close connection with at least one adult who demonstrates a caring attitude combined with a concern for the learner's advancement (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2005). The caring instructor who believes in their learners' ability to succeed can have a positive Pygmalion Effect on them, whereby believing in potential creates potential. If instructors show care and concern to learners as individuals, and make it clear that they are invested in their learners' progress, this may be reflected in the learners' levels of achievement (Learning Point Associates, 2005).

Successful programs are flexible, student-focused, and tailored to the needs and competencies of the learners.

Learners are also more likely to persist in their studies when they find themselves in an environment which clearly has high expectations for their learning (Tinto, 2003). Research has shown that in more successful schools, instructors have a collective belief that not only all learners have the ability to learn, but also that instructors can

make a difference in the process (Meltzer et al., 2001). For many learners with low literacy self-esteem, the motivation to read and write depends on their perception of whether the instructor believes in them or not, and whether they think the instructor will eventually give up on them (Meltzer & Hamann, 2004).

A study by Alberta Learning in 2001 determined the components necessary for successful high school programs for immigrant youth. Among these components were flexible and student-focused schools, and courses tailored to the needs and competencies of the learners (Alberta Learning, 2001). Although this report was concerned with high school programs, the same principles can be applied to programs for young adults who are no longer eligible to attend high school, as many of their basic educational needs and issues are the same.

Young adult ESL literacy learners face many challenges and barriers to their educational achievement, and as a result they need relevant, focused instruction and support. If this group of learners is to go on to complete their education and have an opportunity to reach their full potential in life, they also need help in transitioning from literacy instruction to the next level, once they are ready. Although there is a lack of data relating directly to the transition from ESL literacy to basic education, feedback from transition programs working at the post-secondary level suggests these programs are placing better prepared students into higher education classes, and as a result they are not only improving their educational prospects, but their immediate working situations as well (Lombardo, 2004). Research does show that the need for transition programs is

Transition programs are needed for young adult ESL learners.

particularly necessary for those who are part of a minority group, socially disadvantaged in some way, or whose parents did not go to college (U.S. Department of Education, 2004).

If ESL literacy transition programs are to be successful there must be genuine collaboration between the ESL program and the programs to which the learners hope to transition into, whether that be at the same school or college; this includes the establishment of good relations and communication between staff dealing with transitioning learners and those in departments that handle matters such as finance and

admissions (Lombardo, 2004). The instructors' role is again important here as more learners successfully transition when their instructors take a proactive role in the transition process (Lombardo, 2004).

In conclusion, the statistics on literacy levels in Canada and the USA are undoubtedly shocking. Far too many people in North America lack the basic reading and writing skills necessary function successfully in today's labour market. As a consequence, millions of citizens are either unemployed or employed in low-paying jobs. Low literacy has a tangible effect on an individual's quality of life. Those with low literacy skills are more likely to be unemployed, live in poverty, or be involved in crime, than those with higher level literacy skills. Low literacy can also adversely affect the growth of a nation. In a country like Canada, the economic potential is enormous, but in order to release this potential all Canadians need to have the necessary literacy skills to fully contribute in the global economy (ABC Canada Literacy Foundation, 2005).

There is clearly an imminent need for improvement in literacy programming at every level. Ignoring this need has serious implications for the future of our nation. Research and practice have provided us with the elements of successful literacy programs, and it is imperative we now use this to make the necessary changes. For young adult literacy learners, the need for improved literacy programming is crucial. We must help these learners build their literacy skills so they can live and work productively as adults. As learners, they deserve the opportunity to be educated in such a way that allows them to go on to contribute fully to society. As a nation, it is essential that they do so. Our economic future depends upon the skills of today's adolescents, and we must waste no time in teaching these citizens of tomorrow the literacy skills they need for success in the workplace and in life.

Through research and practice, the key elements of successful literacy programs have been identified. The crucial task now is for programs to incorporate all these elements.

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The Three Stages of a Successful Transition Program

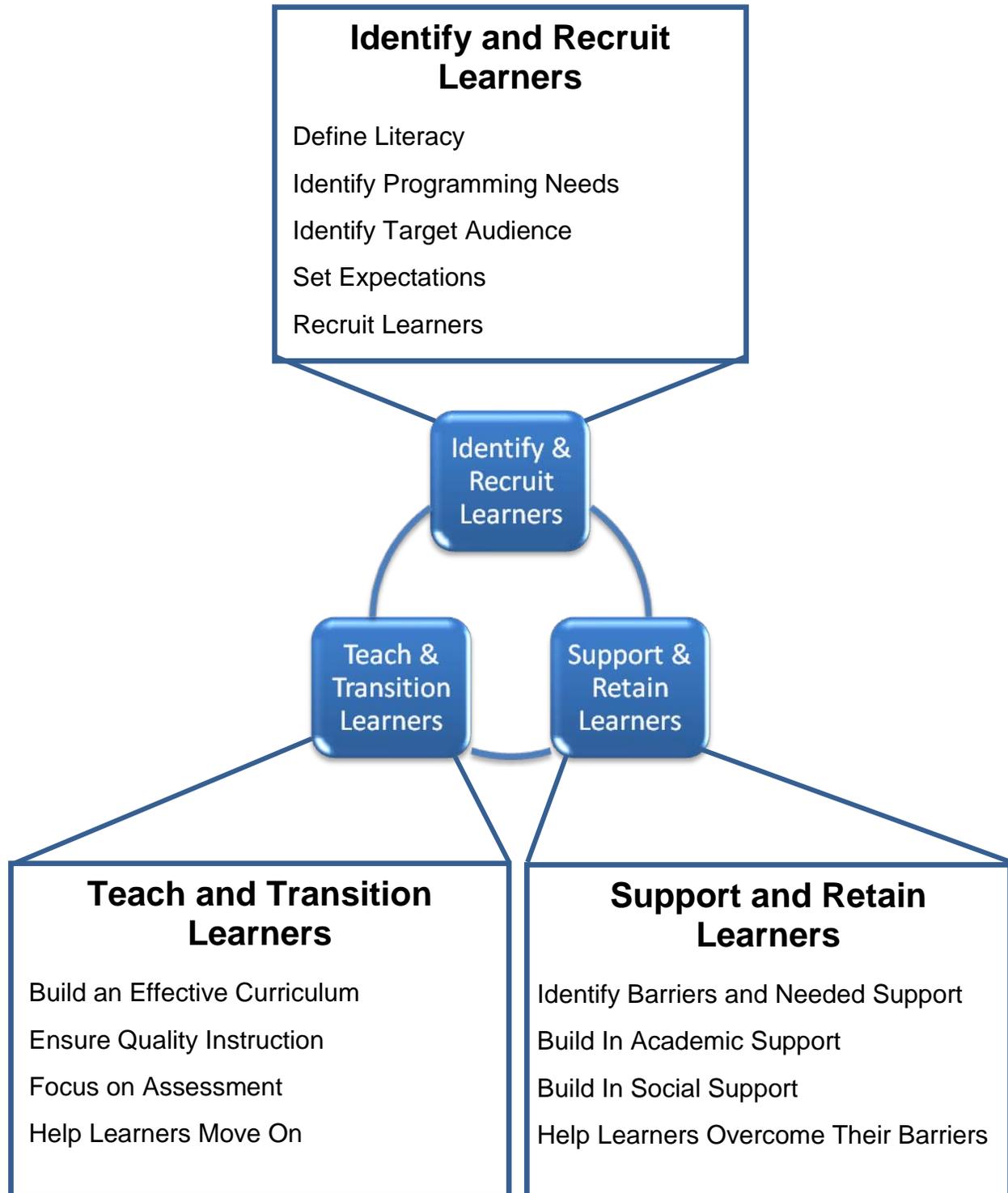
During our years of teaching and transitioning literacy learners, we have reflected on themes that stand out for us, such as the barriers that learners face, a broadened definition of literacy, and the importance of motivation and engagement of learners. We have also witnessed the value of quality instruction, the significance of goal setting for learners, and the necessity of supporting learners, both socially and academically.

Our review of the literature confirmed our experience. We found the same broad themes in the literature that we have noted over the years. We believe these themes translate directly into major components of transition programs that are critical for learner success. In this framework, we have used these elements to create three stages that reflective practitioners and administrators can use to develop successful transition programs. These three stages are:



The three stages are grounded in research and experience and they represent the key components of successful transition programs for young adult literacy learners. The chapters that follow explore each stage in detail.

Overview of the Three Stages



Identify and Recruit Learners

Transition programs are not easy to build, and learners who fit transition programs are not always easy to find. Recruiting them can be challenging, especially if they have dropped out or given up on the system. Ahmad's story below is an example of one frustrated, angry learner whose life was changed because he was successfully identified and recruited to a transition program.

Success Stories from the Bridge Program: Ahmad's Story

Ahmad tried to enter upgrading classes at the college after high school, but he failed to qualify. As a result, he lost all confidence in the education system, became disenfranchised, and decided he was never going to return to study. Ahmad's high school ESL teacher had heard about the Bridge Program through a presentation at the school and she encouraged him to enrol. Although Ahmad agreed to give the program a try, he was very reluctant at first, and he made it clear that he didn't really believe the program was the answer for him.

Within just a few weeks of being in class, Ahmad began to flourish. After a year, Ahmad not only transitioned into upgrading classes, but he was also nominated for a student award. During Ahmad's time with the program, he was able to develop a point of reference, and this helped him to set goals and make realistic plans for the future. He began to feel optimistic about what the future could hold and confident that he would eventually achieve all that he wanted to. Ahmad openly admits that the Bridge Program helped him to find his way again. He still maintains ties to the program, is an advocate for the program amongst his peers, and has expressed an interest in forming an alumni association.

Ahmad's story helps demonstrate the vital role that effective transition programs can play in learners' lives. This chapter explores the first step – how to effectively identify and recruit those learners.

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Define Literacy

Action Items

- Develop a definition of literacy for your program.
- Explicitly define the goals of the program.
- Think holistically: Focus on the needs of the whole learner: academic, social, personal, etc.

Definition of literacy

For many people, there is an assumption that a literacy program is one which teaches basic reading and writing skills. These skills can be as fundamental as learning the alphabet and how to hold a pencil, or perhaps how to write a few sentences and read a very simple short story. While these are certainly the characteristics of many literacy programs, a transition program to help young adults access further education must extend beyond what most people think literacy instruction can be or can achieve.

The focus of a transition program should be to offer a structured and supported learning environment in which to build on and develop the many, varied skills that learners bring with them to the classroom.

Remember that for many literacy learners their previous educational experiences may have been negative, and that praise and encouragement in the classroom may be something new to them. Strive to make all learners experience confidence and security in the classroom and to make their learning experience as purposeful, stimulating, and enjoyable as possible.

Ultimately, literacy means capacity building. Transition programs for literacy learners build capacity in learners by giving them the support and guidance they need in their studies, while at the same time building their confidence and encouraging them to become independent both as learners and as individuals.

Program goals

Building a successful transition program requires a clear and articulate vision of the kind of program to be offered. To accomplish this vision, programs must set ambitious, measurable, and achievable goals that will help their learners prepare for successful transitioning. Having these goals explicitly defined and in constant focus for all those involved in the program will help avoid the most common pitfalls of literacy programs: becoming a dead-end for learners and becoming a catch-all for those learners who are not fitting or succeeding elsewhere.

It is vital that a program leads somewhere and gives learners the best opportunity to improve, feel success, and move on to either further educational programming or the workplace. A literacy transitioning program should be a stepping stone that learners can use to get to where they want to go next. It should help learners transition into further study or the workplace and support them in this process. In this context, program goals will help learners feel a sense of direction in their learning and be certain that what they are doing in the classroom is not only useful and relevant now, but will also help them succeed in the future. If this certainty is not achieved, the program is at risk of becoming a dead-end leaving learners without any direction and feeling dissatisfied and unfulfilled.

Explicit and measurable program goals that are designed to help a specific target audience succeed will also help programs to avoid another common failure of literacy programs – being a catch-all program. Catch-all programs are easy to recognize. They have no clear goals for learner development and they are full of learners who have not been demonstrating progress in mainstream classes or who do not fit anywhere else. Often, they are simply a last chance class for many struggling learners. Unfortunately, catch-all programs often lead to frustration for learners as well as instructors. Rather

than focusing on clear goals for a specific audience, they can lack focus and become poor learning environments for all learners. Left in this situation, programs become the dead end we want to avoid. To prevent this from occurring, programs must have clear, explicit goals that are focused on what the particular needs of their chosen target audience. (For more information about target audience, see the section in this chapter called “Identify Target Audience”.)

Holistic thinking

Learners in the Bridge Program do not need instruction in the most basic literacy skills, but they do need to improve their literacy and essential skills in order to transition to the next step in their educational and/or employment plans. Instruction in our program centres on improving learners’ literacy skills through outcomes that focus on reading, writing, learning strategies, and essential skills. Reading and writing outcomes are at the heart of the program and outline core reading and writing tasks to be accomplished.

The participants in the Bridge Program are ESL learners as well as literacy learners, so the program also includes a language learning support component. There is flexibility within the curriculum to allow instructors to respond to the particular language needs of their current group of learners. For example, pronunciation is incorporated into instruction as needed to help learners develop their literacy and language skills.

In the Bridge Program we have high expectations of our learners and we make these expectations clear to the class as a whole and to learners as individuals during regular one-on-one consultations. We also demonstrate confidence in our learners’ abilities and openly encourage and praise them whenever it is justified. We have found that learners react favourably to the support, encouragement, and praise they are given, and that the positive attitude of instructors leads to positive classroom results.

There are often questions surrounding how far literacy instruction should go. In other words, when is a learner no longer in need of literacy support? In the Bridge Program, we give support until learners are suitably prepared to move on to where they

want to go next. As a consequence, the ultimate length of our support and the literacy level to which learners are supported differs between individuals. Through close monitoring of learners' progress towards their goals, we aim to ensure that all learners receive the length and level of support that is right for them, and that when they leave the Bridge Program they are adequately prepared for where they are going next.

In the Bridge Program, we believe in giving direction to learners in making choices and setting goals, and giving them advice as necessary, but our ultimate aim is to help learners develop the skills and strategies to help themselves. Our main goal is, of course, teaching learners the literacy skills they need, but integral to that is also helping learners build the learning skills and life skills they will need after they leave us.

We always strive for learners to be aware of where they are now in relation to where they want to go next, and the steps they will need to take to achieve their goals. Program classes consist of small homogeneous groups, with usually a maximum of fifteen learners at approximately the same level, and consequently instructors can provide greater and more specific attention to each individual learner. Instructors can also spend time helping learners set goals and clearly see the stepping stones within program. Instructors make clear where learners are now, where they could go next, and how they can get there. Learners have very individual goals and aspirations, and the focused small-group nature of the program helps learners set, monitor, and realise their goals by developing their reading, writing, strategy use, and essential skills.

Potential Bridge Program learners are all interviewed and then given the initial reading and writing assessments before being accepted into the program. We have created our own assessments that are based on the program reading and writing outcomes. After completion of the reading and writing assessments, learners are placed in either the Intermediate or Advanced stream of the program, or depending on their results of the interview and the assessment, they are recommended to another program that will better suit their needs.

Identify Programming Needs

Action Items

- Reflect on your situation: Are you building a new program or modifying an existing one?
- Determine what programs are already available for your target audience.
- Bring key stakeholders together to identify gaps in programming.
- Find a niche for your program.

Note: Identifying program needs may happen before, after or at the same time as identifying your target audience.

Identifying programming needs is a good investment of your time. It helps you understand your audience and the barriers they face. It allows you to determine what program supports and academic requirements your learners will need. It also lets you build a unique program that fills a niche in your community. However you choose to identify program needs, you can be sure it is an instrumental part of developing a program that meets needs but does not duplicate what is already available.

Program development: building or modifying?

When identifying program needs, consider what stage you are at in program development. For example, are you planning to start a new program? Or, are you already running a program and modifying it? Either way, identifying program needs is a vital step in making your program viable and responsive to needs in your community. Remember, this process is not about knowing the needs of a small group of individual learners in an existing class. This is not a classroom level needs analysis. Here, you are determining needs at a program or community level.

What is already available?

One of the first steps in determining programming needs is to learn what programs are already available for your target audience or for similar target audiences. The best programs meet needs that are not being met elsewhere, or they do things in a unique way. Therefore, when developing a transition program, find out what needs are not being met locally or build a program that meets local needs in a unique way. There are many ways to find out what needs are not being met. You might already know, you may have connections in the community, or you might get in contact with stakeholders and brainstorm together. You may even carry out a formal needs assessment in your community.



See the Tool Box at the end of this chapter for:

- Useful Web Resources about Needs Assessments

Identify the gaps

Identifying the gaps in current programming is another step in identifying the program needs for your target audience. The best way to identify gaps is to gather key stakeholders together in a meeting or roundtable discussion and find out what programs are already in place. Program providers and key stakeholders are in an excellent

position to help corroborate the target audience's needs and to identify which needs are not being met sufficiently. In a meeting of program providers and key stakeholders, be sensitive to the group dynamics and run the meeting as a guided discussion with the goal of identifying gaps in current programming. When working with other program providers, make sure they understand that the point of the meeting is to ensure that your program does not duplicate the services offered by existing programs.



See the Tool Box at the end of this chapter for:

- Outline for an Initial Stakeholders Meeting

Find your niche

Duplicating other programs available to your audience is not the best use of resources, regardless of whether or not those programs are succeeding. What your program needs to do is fill in the gaps, offer a true alternative to learners that fulfills their unmet needs and does so in a distinctive way. Therefore, once you have identified the gaps in programming for your target audience, you can find the niche that the program will fill in the community and then develop the special characteristics that will make your program unique.

When Bow Valley College began the process of developing a program for adolescent immigrant youth, we reflected on our situation and felt that we did not know enough about the needs of this target audience in our urban centre. Therefore, we decided to carry out a one year needs assessment to support the development process. We met with many key stakeholders, including learners, high school teachers and counsellors, school district staff, and other service providers in the community. We used focus groups, interviews, and questionnaires to gather information about the gaps in post-high school programming for learners. This needs assessment supplied key information that helped identify the programming needs of our audience, and it allowed us to find our niche in the community and avoid duplicating existing programs. This groundwork was fundamental to the development of the Bridge Program. It gave us

confidence in the knowledge that our program would offer a missing and crucial stepping-stone for learners in their educational journey.

Identify Target Audience

Action Items

- Define your target audience carefully.
- Recognize the literacy needs of your learners.
- Develop learner profiles.
- Clearly articulate the minimum listening, speaking, and literacy levels required for entry into the program.
- Set parameters for your program.
- Recognize that young adult learners are not adults nor are they children.

Define your target audience

A program needs a specific target audience and it must shape itself to fit the needs of that audience. Without a clear target audience in mind, it is impossible for a program to properly focus on what they must do to best serve the learners in the program.

Successful literacy transition programs must choose their target audience carefully and ensure they are given all the support and encouragement necessary to succeed. For programs to be successful, they must be very clear about their target group and not fall into the trap of being a catch-all. The boundaries may need to be

flexible, but the entire administrative and instructional team in the program should have a clear and articulate vision of who their target group is and why. This way, they will have a greater opportunity to meet their learners' needs.

Learners in the Bridge Program come from a variety of backgrounds, and each one brings with them a different set of skills, challenges, and literacy needs. The learners are alike in many ways: they have already mastered the basic literacy skills; they have usually attended high school in Canada for at least two years; and they all have gaps in their learning. The learners also have in common the fact that no one has time to waste. This group is on the brink of their adult lives and as such is keen to move through the program and on to what comes next. Many learners already feel that they have been “held back” by the educational system and want to catch up with their peers as soon as possible. Therefore, it is vital that learners remain engaged and motivated in class at all times, and that there is always a good reason for why they are involved in any particular task. These learners have no time for “busy work” and nor does the Bridge Program. We are sensitive to our learners' situations, the pressure many of them feel to advance as quickly as possible, and the need for all of them to see that what they are doing not only has relevance now but is also helping them to achieve their own particular goals.

As a program, we have clearly defined this group as our target audience and ensured that the program reflects the needs of that audience. We believe it is important to remember that no program can ever be all things to all learners.

Literacy needs

Despite the many commonalities, young adults in literacy transition programs remain a diverse group. Some learners have had little or no formal education, and they need help to “learn how to learn” as well as to develop their English skills. Other learners may have had some high school education, but they are still unfamiliar with the Roman alphabet and need help developing their English skills. Still others simply need more time to develop their literacy skills in English, for what is a variety of reasons. As a result of this diversity, it can be difficult to determine whether learners' needs are

caused by language issues, i.e. they do not have enough language to fulfill academic-like tasks, or by literacy issues, i.e. they do not have enough reading and writing skills to fulfill the task. Consequently, instructors should focus on both the building blocks of language and the academic skills and strategies of reading and writing, tailoring the content and focus of classes to the needs of their particular group of learners.

The young adult literacy learners in the Bridge Program do not fit the description many would give of “typical” literacy learners. People often assume literacy learners are in need of instruction in the ABC’s of literacy, and this is often the case, but not for learners in the Bridge Program. Our audience is adolescent learners that we consider to be underserved by the education system. They already have some basic literacy skills but need to receive more focused literacy and language instruction in order to be able to transition into further educational studies or workplace training. They need purposeful, meaningful instruction, help in developing their life skills, and on-going program support to build confidence, independence, and security. With this always in mind, the program is able to ensure our learners are given the appropriate instruction and guidance to help successfully transition them to where they want to go next.

Learner profiles

A learner profile is a description of the characteristics of the target audience. It helps identify who fits the program and equally who does not fit the program. Learner profiles may contain information such as learner age, literacy level or needs, language level or needs, years of education, years of English instruction/immersion, age on arrival to Canada, citizenship status, length of time in Canada, and/or other descriptive information. Depending upon the needs in the community, a description of the identified target audience may contain some, all, or few of those descriptors listed above.

Minimum entry requirements

Clearly articulate the minimum listening, speaking, and literacy levels required for learners to enter the program. Use clear and descriptive language that helps all stakeholders understand the minimum requirements. While it is true that programs need

to adjust based on the changing needs of their population, they must also strike a delicate balance between opening the doors too wide (and therefore risking becoming a catch-all program that does not serve anyone well) and restricting the audience too much.

Program parameters

Now that you have carefully identified your audience and developed learner profiles to describe that audience, use the profiles to inform stakeholders of your specific target group. This information helps stakeholders make appropriate referrals and communicate clearly with the people they serve. It can distinguish your audience from other programs' audiences. Transition programs can also use their own learner profiles to help them maintain a clear picture of their audience.

Young adult learners

It is vital to understand your target group if you are to provide the optimum program for them. From our work with 18- to 25-year-old immigrant youth, we have found that as a group, they often do not demonstrate adult maturity. They are at an in-between stage, confident and street-wise at times and yet also vulnerable and immature. Because of their unique circumstances, these learners should be treated as neither adults nor children, but as a unique group in need of considerable support and guidance during what is their process of becoming adult learners. As young adults, they require learning experiences that are practical and relevant. As learners who lack much of the life experience of an adult, and face multiple barriers to their learning, they need to receive instruction within a caring, flexible environment that encourages and celebrates their success, while building the independence, self-confidence, and maturity levels that will be expected of them in the next stage along their educational journey.

Set Expectations

Action Items

- Set academic expectations for learner growth.
- Develop college readiness in learners.
- Clearly communicate program expectations to learners often.
- Encourage learner independence and risk-taking.
- Recognize that realistically learners will need time to achieve academic and college readiness expectations.
- Build multiple level increments within the structure of larger program levels to help learners demonstrate progress.
- Provide learners with reference points to help them gauge their abilities.
- Show belief in learners' abilities.

Academic expectations for learner growth

Transition programs should have rigorous expectations for learners. Literacy programs that are not transition programs may be satisfied if learners simply do any kind of reading or writing. However, transition programs must expect learners to move past that level and advance to a level where they can accomplish specific outcomes. For example, to transition on to further education, learners must not only write, but write on topic, and they must be able to follow instructions. Of course, depending on the level of learners, the time and support it takes to meet these expectations will vary. Transition programs, however, must set high expectations for their learners, be clear about those expectations, and be accountable for bringing learners to that level.

In the Bridge Program, we have rigorous expectations for learner improvement. Our goal is to help learners transition on to further educational programming within two years of entering our program. To help our program meet these expectations, we must ensure that we have adequate screening in place so that we are not unrealistic in our expectations of learners.

We also have behavioural expectations of learners outlined in a set of guiding principles. They include:

1. respecting all members of the class/program
2. arriving at class on time and ready to work
3. attending class regularly
4. actively participating in group work
5. completing class and homework assignments in a timely fashion
6. adhering to the “class rules”, which are made in collaboration with all learners and instructors and which are agreed upon at the beginning of each semester.

In our experience, it is important to build in standards such as these and to communicate them clearly and often to learners. (For more information, see the section below called “Clearly Communicate Expectations”.)

College readiness in learners

College readiness is an important element for transition programs to nurture in learners. If learners can demonstrate academic readiness in your program but are unprepared for the challenges and expectations of being an adult learner in an adult context, they may be destined to fail or drop out once they have transitioned out of your program.

College readiness describes the characteristics that adult learners need to demonstrate to function well in an adult learning context. In the Bridge Program, we have defined college readiness as respect, responsibility, and participation. This definition includes a multitude of possibilities such as knowing your schedule, bringing everything you need to every class, doing your homework, handing in assignments on time, and taking the initiative to catch up on missed work and to communicate early on with instructors regarding any questions or problems. It also includes attending class regularly, being on time for class, and being ready to participate by sharing ideas and asking questions. These characteristics of a good learner may seem like something to be taken for granted, but in our experience, they can never be taken for granted. These are academic learner behaviours and attitudes that are culturally-based and learned, not innate. For many literacy learners, particularly those who have a background that includes long stretches of interrupted formal education, college readiness is a foreign concept. Learners often think that if they have the academic skills necessary, they will succeed in a given program or class. They may also consider success to be just getting into a program or course. Helping them to understand that success comes with progress, and not just entrance into a program, requires coaching. Programs should ensure a clear, explicit, and consistent focus on college readiness across every part of the transition program. Using a college readiness rubric, such as the one found in the Tool Box at the end of this chapter, can help keep that focus.



See the Tool Box at the end of this chapter for:

- Readiness Rubric

Clearly communicate expectations

In transition programs, it is necessary to ensure that learners get explicit help to understand the expectations of them. Not only do learners need to understand the expectations for their academic growth, but they also need to know what is expected of them in terms of their college readiness, and their behaviour in an adult classroom. They also need to understand what it takes to meet those expectations and how well they are demonstrating them now. Clear communication between learners and the whole program team, therefore, is a necessary factor in successfully transitioning learners.

One way to help communicate expectations is to guide learners to develop a set of rules for classroom behaviour that everyone can agree on. Then, engage in regular and explicit discussion of the rules and expectations. It may help to post academic outcomes and expectations, rules, guidelines, and readiness rubrics on the classroom wall. Learners may be given a copy of them to refer to regularly. The program team should also ensure that learners remain aware of the level of commitment required to meet expectations and how a committed work ethic is necessary in order for learners to succeed and move on to the next stage in reaching their goal. Remember, too, that learners need praise and encouragement, so be sure to celebrate success!



See the Tool Box at the end of this chapter for:

- Rules for Learners

Learner independence and risk-taking

Programs should also expect learners to become more independent as their time with the program continues. To accomplish this, use an approach that is both structured and supportive, and integrate measures throughout the program that foster learner independence, such as decision-making, using strategies, problem-solving, goal setting, self-evaluation, and other measures. Instructors should encourage learners to be actively involved in their own learning, include them in decision making as appropriate, and demonstrate that it is a good thing to take risks in the classroom. Instruction in

learning strategies and essential skills can help learners develop the skills they need to become successful learners in the classroom and effective in dealing with their life issues outside. When working with those in the program team who provide social support, such as the student advisor and student support worker, learners should be expected to be active participants. They should work towards being proactive in the measures taken to help them, whether they relate directly to the classroom or to their personal lives. With coaching, learners can be guided in ways that allow them to take action themselves. They can also be offered the opportunity to report back on the outcomes of their actions so that they feel instrumental in the problem-solving process and gain confidence in their abilities to help themselves.

The learners' maturity levels play a large role in their ability to self-manage and be more independent. Be aware that learners in transition programs often do not have as well-developed maturity levels as other learners. It is critical that the entire program team understand and respond appropriately to the lower maturity levels they may encounter in their learners. Also, it is crucial that the program itself be structured to help develop that maturity. In the Bridge Program, we have integrated college readiness expectations throughout the entire program. Also, we have developed a special course called "Futures In Training" or "FIT". The FIT program is specially designed to help learners understand their emerging position in the adult context, both as adult learners and as adult members of the community. The FIT course, therefore, focuses on important aspects of the learners' skills for successful participation in school and in the community. These skills include things like budgeting, understanding the cost of living on your own, recognizing personal career interests, and career planning. Since maturity and college readiness are such important factors in learners' success in post-secondary education, programs are well-advised to integrate many different ways of developing and celebrating those characteristics in their learners.

Realistic timeframes

Programs must be keenly aware of the demands that their expectations place on learners. To be realistic, programs must understand that it takes time for many literacy

learners to demonstrate progress. Programs need to work with literacy learners over a period of time and not expect every learner to make huge gains quickly. Therefore, programs should be structured in a way that does not make that reality seem like a failure.

In the Bridge Program, we have found that every stakeholder (learners, families, instructors, referring agencies, etc.) wants to know how long it will take for learners to move on to the next level. We have also found that most learners will expect to move from level to level with a cohort of learners. This means that if learners begin their program with a certain group of students in the same class, they will expect to move on together. Therefore, if certain learners move on earlier because they can demonstrate academic progress and college readiness before other learners, there may be misunderstandings, tensions, or difficulties that arise for the learners who are “left behind”. Programs need to be prepared for these expectations and take steps to help learners understand the individualized nature of advancement in transition programs. It may be challenging, but learners (and other stakeholders) should be coached and helped to recognize their individual needs and understand their incremental progress. Learners need to expect that they may be in a certain level for at least a year and that it is not the amount of time in a level that determines when they move on, but their actual demonstrated academic progress. This can be hard for learners to understand, particularly because the model of elementary and secondary education is intricately linked to advancement based on age and length of time in a grade. Learners may have become accustomed to the idea that they will move on to the next level at the end of the semester or the end of the school year. They need help to understand that pushing them through to the next level regardless of their academic progress is not the answer.

Often, instructors also struggle with this concept. The pressure to move learners on can be strong. If a learner has been in an instructor’s class for more than one semester or more than one year, the instructor may feel the need to recognize the learner’s efforts by advancing the learner to the next level, even if, for example, the demonstrated reading and writing performance of that learner does not warrant advancement. Focusing on individual learning plans and structuring the program to have open entry

and exit points at multiple times over the course of a school year can help in this regard. Everyone involved in the program must understand that expectations are high but that it is realistic that meeting these expectations will take time. The entire instructional team including instructors, support workers, and advisors should coach and help learners understand that they move because of academic progress and college readiness, not just because of a length of time in a level, not because others in the class are moving on, and not as a reward for being a “good student”.

Multiple level increments

Literacy learners need to feel successful in school, and often that feeling of success comes from the knowledge that learners are progressing from one level to the next. It can be difficult for learners to feel successful, however, if it takes them a long time to move from one level to the next. This situation does not indicate that they are not progressing, but that the levels may represent too great of a gain, and that gain will take the learners a long time to achieve. Therefore, programs need to find ways of helping learners feel success even while they may be progressing incrementally. One way to do this is to structure transition programs with multiple levels that represent narrower increments of progress. As they move from one level to the next, it is easier for learners to feel encouraged and to continue studying.

By building multiple level increments within the structure of the program, learners can recognize their incremental progress. In the Bridge Program, for example, there are 3 “levels” called Intermediate, Advanced, and Advanced Transitional. However, within each level, there are multiple increments that reflect progress in demonstrated reading and writing outcomes. This helps learners see their progress despite the fact that they may take more than one year to move, for example, from the Intermediate level to the Advanced level.

Building a program structure with multiple levels does not necessarily mean that each level needs to constitute one class of learners. In the Bridge Program, for example, there are six levels spanning across three class groupings: Intermediate, Advanced, and Advanced Transitional. Learners in the program are expected to make

gains and to transition on to the next stage of their educational and/or career plan within two years. For learners who enter at the minimum literacy level in our program, for example, the next stage of their educational plan may be the next level in the Bridge Program. For learners at an Intermediate level, this could mean transitioning into a more advanced level of the program, where they may stay for a further two years. Learners at one of the advanced levels are expected to transition to either basic education classes or upgrading within the college, or to other workplace/educational programs, within their two years. We have found that the multiple levels in our program offer the learners an important opportunity to recognize their progress, celebrate their successes, and focus on what they need to do to get to the next step along a continuum of incremental gains.



See the Tool Box at the end of this chapter for:

- Description of Bridge Program Levels

Provide reference points

Understanding expectations is important for learners. We have found, however, that many learners come to the program with no real reference point for their own level of reading, writing, and language use and therefore they have no way of gauging their own abilities. There is often a vast difference between their perceived level and their actual level. For example, our learners are often confused when they find out that, because of their literacy levels, they cannot get into high school upgrading courses. Therefore, when they come to the Bridge Program, we help them understand their level while being sensitive to their frustrations and confusion.

Providing a point of reference for learners is essential to help them understand the expectations that they will encounter in this program and in their future programs. For example, we often discuss with learners the level of support they receive in our program and we compare that to the level of support that they can expect at the next stage of their educational journey. In our program, learners receive five hours of instruction per day and have very little homework. However, in the next program they transition to, they will receive fewer hours of in-class instruction and will be expected to

do several hours of independent learning and homework per day. Another way we help learners understand their own level and get a reference point is by practicing timed assignments. Often, learners find that they could do better on a reading test or writing assignment if they were only given more time. We often discuss time frames and expectations in higher levels. This helps them realize that becoming faster and more independent in their learning and performance is an essential part of getting ready to transition to a higher level.

Show belief in learners' abilities

Within the Bridge Program, there is a collective belief among instructors and administrators that all learners have the potential to succeed, and we ensure learners are made aware of this belief. We are sensitive to the fact that many young adult literacy learners have had little or no confidence shown in their abilities in the past, and that this approach is often a new and exciting educational experience for them. We have found that this practice can give learners the initial boost of confidence they often need in order to successfully begin their journey with us. We have also found that learners respond positively to being informed of what they are expected to do in order to fulfill the expectations of the program, especially as we have already made it clear that we think they are able to fulfill these expectations. In the Bridge Program we believe in the Pygmalion effect, whereby believing in potential creates potential, and we have seen this effect on many occasions as learners respond positively to our approach, welcome the belief that is being shown in them, and begin to flourish in the classroom.

Recruit Learners

Action Items

- Develop a learner recruitment process.
- Make program expectations clear.
- Develop intake assessments to screen potential learners.
- Structure program to allow for open entry and transition points.
- Develop visuals to show multiple pathways in and out of the program.

Learner recruitment process

When working with young adult literacy learners, transition programs must pay special attention to recruitment because these learners are already at a high risk of dropping out of the educational system. Transition programs must make sure that they reach out to learners and that learners have easy access to their programs. To do this, recruitment must be viewed as an ongoing and long term process. It is a concept that encompasses more than filling program seats in a given semester. Recruitment in a broader sense is about reaching out to possible learners, even before they are ready to begin a program. It involves planting seeds that will foster life-long learning. And for transition programs, this means reaching out to learners who may not feel connected to or valued by the education system. This can present challenges but, with preparation and planning, programs can meet and overcome these challenges.

In the section of this chapter called “Identify Target Audience”, you developed learner profiles. Now, use the profiles you developed and consider how you will recruit those learners. When developing a learner recruitment process many factors have to be considered, such as where the learners are, how you will gain access to them, and when is the best time to start talking to them. Consider offering information sessions in schools and community agencies. Create and distribute program information materials written especially for learners, families, schools, and other stakeholders. If the recruitment process is being carried out within the school system, ensure it begins at least several months before the end of the school term. Recruitment takes time, so any later than that and the opportunity to catch the learners early enough may be missed.

Clear program expectations

As with learner profiles, clear program expectations help stakeholders make more appropriate referrals. In the early stages of program development, it is important to decide upon what your program intends to achieve with learners and how this will be achieved. Then, these expectations need to be communicated clearly to stakeholders to ensure that only those learners willing to accept and commit to your expectations are referred to the program. Open lines of communication between program developers and stakeholders are vital in order to avoid misunderstandings over some of the most fundamental elements of the program, such as who your program intends to serve, your program’s goals for learners, and the learner commitment you expect.

Intake assessments and screening

No matter how clearly you communicate your program expectations to stakeholders, learners that are incompatible for your program may still be referred. As a result, before accepting any learner it is important that they are adequately assessed and screened. Completing an intake assessment with each learner referred to the program serves to screen out those learners who do not fit the profile and are therefore not best suited for your program. If a learner is found to be an unsuitable candidate, attempts should be made to help them find another more appropriate program.

Programs should be cautious about accepting learners who are clearly unsuitable since this is the first step in allowing your program to become the “catch-all” discussed earlier (see Program Goals in Identify and Recruit Learners).



See the Tool Box at the end of this chapter for:

- Intake Assessment Form

Transition points

To facilitate recruitment, structure your program to include open entry and transition points. Due to the nature of the target audience, transition programs need to be accessible whenever learners are ready to enrol. For example, it is not realistic to expect an interested learner who is ready to join the program in February to wait until September to begin their studies. Equally, if learners are ready to exit the program and take their next step, they should not be held back by a fixed exit point too far in the future. With proper planning, programs can be structured to maximize recruitment.

Multiple pathways in and out of the program

There should be more than one route in and out of transition programs. A simple map of the possible pathways learners may take to enter, progress through, and exit programs helps inform learners, referring institutions, and all stakeholders, about the possibilities the program offers. Pathway maps give stakeholders the chance to see how a transition program is designed for flexibility and learner access. It is also important to recognize that not all learners will want to transition onto basic education or upgrading classes after completing a program. For some, a workplace program or even direct entry into the workforce may be the best option for them. Success for programs and learners within them depends upon a flexible approach that caters to individual needs and abilities.



See the Tool Box at the end of this chapter for:

- Visual Describing Program Pathways

Build Relationships

With High Schools and School Boards

- Meet with schools and boards to identify gaps in programming
- Develop formal or informal partnerships and processes to help schools and school boards identify and refer learners to the program.
- Meet regularly to keep partners fully informed.
- Keep lines of communication open.
- Go into schools to meet with/ advise potential learners well before their transition time.

With Community Resources

- Establish connections with agencies and service providers in the community such as youth and immigrant serving agencies.
- Meet with community stakeholders to identify gaps in programming.
- Develop a process to help agencies identify and refer learners to the program.
- Keep lines of communication open.

Within Your Own Institution

- Ensure registration area has current information regarding your program, its transition times, and the multiple pathways in and out of the program.
- Help front line workers understand the literacy needs of the target audience.
- Give front line workers sufficient information about the program and audience so that they can identify and refer learners.

With Other Post-Secondary Institutions

- Ensure other institutions have current information about the program and transition times.
- Develop formal or informal partnerships and processes to help institutions identify and refer learners to the program.
- Be aware of programs offered by other institutions so that learners who do not fit your transition program can be referred.

With Governments and Funders

- Meet with government and funding representatives to identify programming needs.
- Advocate for funding and development of transition programs for the target audience.

Tool Box

Useful Web Resources on Needs Assessments...page 61

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Readiness Rubric.....page 63

Rules for Learners.....page 64

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Useful Web Resources on Needs Assessments

For more information on planning and designing a needs assessment, see:

Archer, T. M., Cripe, R., & McCaslin, N.L. (2002) *Ohio State University Fact Sheet: Making a difference*. Retrieved March 14, 2007 from <http://ohioline.osu.edu/bc-fact/0009.html>

For information on the steps to conducting a needs assessment, see:

Rouda, R. H. & Kusy, M. E., Jr. (1996). *Needs assessment – the first step*. Retrieved March 14, 2007 from http://alumnus.caltech.edu/~rouda/T2_NA.html

For information on needs assessment techniques, see:

Carter, K.A., & Beaulieu, L.J. (1992) *Conducting a community needs assessment: Primary data collection techniques*. Florida Cooperative Extension Service. Florida. Retrieved March 13, 2007 from <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/pdffiles/HE/HE06000.pdf>

Outline for an Initial Stakeholders Meeting

When conducting a meeting with key stakeholders, follow an outline like this to help identify gaps in programming.

- ☞ Identify key stakeholders and bring them together in a roundtable discussion/meeting
- ☞ Clearly articulate the intended target audience
- ☞ Work with stakeholders to identify the needs of the target audience and the barriers they face to participation in educational programming
- ☞ Identify the kind of program supports learners would need to overcome their barriers
- ☞ Identify programs that are already available for the target audience
- ☞ Determine which needs are not being met by the programs already in existence

OR

- ☞ Identify a unique way that the needs could be met in a new program
- ☞ Clearly articulate how the new program will avoid duplicating other programs currently available
- ☞ Establish a formal or informal agreement and recruitment process with stakeholders to encourage appropriate referrals of learners to the new program

Readiness Rubric

Use a rubric like this to define readiness in concrete ways and to focus learners on how well they are demonstrating it.

College Readiness Evaluation Rubric

<p><i>Respect</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • listen carefully to others • let one person talk at a time • do not disrupt class • do not bring electronics to class • keep the classroom tidy • treat everyone with respect • treat others equally 	Needs Improvement	Satisfactory	Successful!
<p><i>Responsibility</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • know your schedule • bring your stuff • keep track of your stuff • do your homework • hand in assignments on time • take initiative to get missed work and complete it • take initiative to communicate with staff about problems 	Needs Improvement	Satisfactory	Successful!
<p><i>Participation</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • attend class regularly • be on time for class • be ready to work in class • ask questions • share ideas • listen carefully 	Needs Improvement	Satisfactory	Successful!

Rules for Learners

Help learners develop a set of class rules together, then give out copies and post them in the class.

Our class has decided that we must all follow these

Rules for Learners

1. I will be respectful.

This means that:

- I will be nice to others and treat them equally.
- I will do my own work and I will not disrupt others.
- I will listen carefully and let one person talk at a time.
- My cell phone/MP3 player will not be seen or heard in class.

2. I will be responsible.

This means that:

- I will be careful of what I do and say.
- I will ask questions when I do not understand.
- I will finish my homework and bring it to class.
- I will bring everything I need. (pens, paper, books, binders, etc.)
- I will take care of my stuff and keep the classroom tidy.
- I will not eat during class and my drinks will have a lid.

3. I will be in class on time.

This means that:

- I will come everyday.
- I will not be late.
- I will be sitting in the classroom and ready to learn a few minutes before class begins.

I agree to follow the rules that the class has developed.

Learner name

Learner signature

Date

Description of Bridge Program Levels

Phase II literacy levels generally describe readers and writers at the Intermediate level in the Bridge Program:

Phase II literacy level
Readers at this level: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• can use pictures, words and context to predict meaning• can use some sight words/phrases, letter-sound correspondence and word families to read text• cannot yet decode automatically
Writers at this level: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• are becoming more familiar with the mechanics of writing at the level of words and sentences• are not yet accurate or consistent in structure or spelling• can write a few simple sentences or phrases about self, family or highly familiar information can locate and copy factual information from simple text, directories and schedules

Taken from Canadian Language Benchmarks 2000: ESL for Literacy Learners, Centre for Canadian Language Benchmarks

Phase III literacy levels generally describe readers and writers at the Advanced level in the Bridge Program:

Phase III literacy level
Readers at this level: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• are becoming able to read a simple multi-paragraph story or article• are becoming able to read in English mostly for information, to learn more language and to develop reading skills• often require re-reading and clarification• may start to read for pleasure
Writers at this level: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• are beginning to convey ideas in writing within predictable contexts of everyday needs and experiences• are developing better control over structure, vocabulary and the mechanics of writing paragraphs• still have difficulty in creative expression beyond memorized language. Use of more complex language or idioms will result in errors• are learning to check own work and make corrections

See the next 2 pages for more detailed information on Phase II (Intermediate) and Phase III (Advanced) levels in the Bridge Program.

Intermediate Levels

READING: The chart below describes reading texts that learners can read and demonstrate an understanding of at the Phase II literacy levels:

Phase II Initial	Phase II Developing	Phase II Adequate
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grade Equivalency (GE) 1-2 • Familiar and personally relevant context • Short texts up to 6 lines • 1-step instructions • Large, clear, easy-to-read print • No wrap around print • High frequency words and phrases in meaningful contexts • Basic adverbs of frequency (always, sometimes, never) • Basic thought groups and prepositional phrases of time (in the morning, at school) • Isolated words from text 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GE 2-3 • Independent at GE 1 • Familiar and personally relevant context • Up to 8 lines • More complex 1-step and simple 2-step instructions • Clear, easy-to-read print • Some wrap around print • High frequency words and phrases in meaningful contexts • Word families according to meaning (teach, teacher, teaching) • Compound words (backpack, grandfather) • Thought groups and prepositional phrases (at 4:00, on the corner) • Isolated words from text 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GE3-4 • Personally relevant • Up to 10 lines • Up to 4-step instructions • Clear and easy-to-read • Variety of fonts • Wrap around text • High frequency words in and out of context • Basic phrases of time (from 2:00 to 3:00, the day before yesterday) • Thought groups and prepositional phrases (from Calgary to Vancouver)

WRITING: The performance indicators below describe the characteristics of learners' writing at the Phase II literacy levels.

	Phase II Initial	Phase II Developing	Phase II Adequate
Vocabulary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • uses some high frequency words with assistance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • uses some high frequency words without assistance • uses some common, familiar words with assistance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • uses high frequency words and some more common, familiar words without assistance
Grammar	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • not yet forming sentences • writes individual words and some phrases 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • demonstrates limited awareness of basic SVO order and simple structures and tenses • attempts to construct phrases and basic sentences 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • demonstrates some awareness of basic SVO order and simple structures and tenses, though without much accuracy • run-on sentences occur frequently
Composition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • very limited amount of text • a few words, phrases, lines 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • short text of several sentences, somewhat fragmented • sentences may be arranged to look somewhat like a paragraph but they do not all support one main idea • very few or no connecting words
Spelling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • uses invented spelling • spells a few high frequency words accurately 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • uses invented spelling for most words • some high frequency words and personal information words are spelled accurately
Accuracy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • not accurate (less than 50% of text is copied accurately) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • somewhat accurate (between 50-74% of text is copied accurately) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • mostly accurate (75-94% of text is copied accurately)

Advanced Levels

READING: The chart below describes reading texts that learners can read and demonstrate an understanding of at the Phase III literacy levels:

Phase III Initial	Phase III Developing	Phase III Adequate
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GE 4-6 • Relevant context • 8-12 information lines up to 2 paragraphs • Clear, easy-to-read fonts • In print with varied font size or print-like handwriting with considerable white space • Common words in context 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GE 5-7 • Relevant context • 10-15 information lines • 3-5 paragraphs • Print with varied font size or print-like handwriting • Common words out of context 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GE 6-9 • Relevant context • 15-20 information lines • One page or 5+ paragraphs • Print with varied fonts and sizes or clear handwriting • Smaller or fine print on the bottom of documents • Connectors: although, however, therefore • More complex written signals

WRITING: The performance indicators below describe the characteristics of learners' writing at the Phase III literacy levels.

	Phase III Initial	Phase III Developing	Phase III Adequate
Vocabulary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • uses common, familiar words • unfamiliar words and phrases are provided by teacher 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • uses some less common words and phrases • uses more descriptive language specific to needs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • uses specific, descriptive vocabulary and less common words and phrases • uses some idiomatic language appropriately
Grammar	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • several one clause sentences • demonstrates some control of simple tenses and sentence structures 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • several simple and compound sentences • attempts some more complex tenses and sentence structures with a little success 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • uses a greater variety of simple and compound sentences • attempts more complex sentences fairly successfully
Organization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • up to 7 sentences or 1 paragraph, indented or block style • some evidence that sentences are organized or ordered • attempts a few connecting words and sequencing phrases with some difficulty 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2-3 paragraphs, indented or block style • topic and supporting sentences are present at times and convey ideas somewhat effectively • somewhat clear beginning, middle, and end • uses some connecting words and sequencing phrases with success 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3-5 paragraphs, indented or block style • conveys main ideas with topic and supporting sentences fairly clearly • clear beginning, middle, and end • uses connecting words and sequencing phrases appropriately
Spelling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • high frequency words spelled with some errors • some invented spelling of familiar words 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • high frequency words spelled accurately • a few errors in spelling of familiar words • invented spelling of complex vocabulary 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • very few errors in spelling common, familiar words • some invented spelling of less common words and more complex vocabulary
Accuracy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • somewhat accurate (between 50-74% of text is copied accurately) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • mostly accurate (75-94% of text is copied accurately) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • very accurate (95-100% of text is copied accurately)
Content	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • some informational content is presented with some accuracy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • sufficient informational content is presented with relative accuracy but little to no interpretation of meaning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • informational content is presented accurately with some relatively insightful interpretation of meaning

Intake Assessment Form

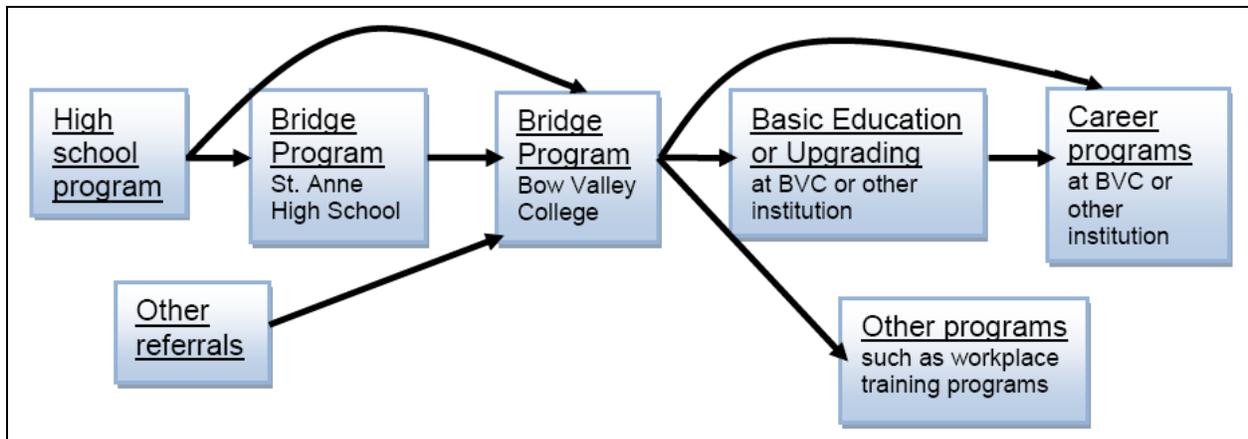
Use a form like this when conducting oral intake assessment interviews to screen new learners.

Student Name: _____ Interviewer: _____ Date: _____

Question	Comments
1. What is your name?	
2. How long have you been in Canada?	
3. Where are you from?	
4. Did you go to school in your first country?	
5. How many years did you go to school in your first country?	
6. When did you stop going to school? Why?	
7. What is your first language?	
8. Please write your name for me in your first language.	
9. Did you have trouble learning to read and write in your first country?	
10. How do you remember things best: when you see them, hear them, or do them?	
11. Did you work in your country? What did you do?	
12. Do you work now? What do you do?	
13. Have you studied English in Canada before? Where? For how long?	
14. Do you speak English at work? At home?	
15. What do you like best to do in English classes: read, write, talk, or listen?	

Visual Describing Program Pathways

Use visuals like this to inform learners and other stakeholders of the many possibilities learners have for entering and exiting the program.



Support and Retain Learners

In transition programs, learners are often high-risk and have specific needs and barriers to learning. Esther and Huy's stories below show that these needs and barriers make it challenging for learners to stay in school.

Success Stories from the Bridge Program: Esther and Huy's Stories

Esther needed a considerable amount of support to help her through many difficult periods during her time with the Bridge Program. She faced health concerns, housing issues, financial worries, and family problems. The support that the program gave Esther allowed her to focus on her studies, to develop strategies to better deal with problems on her own in the future, and ultimately, to transition into another program at the college after two years in the Bridge Program. The confidence she gained enabled her to negotiate her acceptance into, and even the waiving of certain pre-requisites for, the health care program she wished to enter. She has now successfully completed her health care program and gone on to find work in a local health care facility. She plans to return to further upgrading classes in the future in order to reach her goal of becoming a Licensed Practical Nurse.

Huy is a classic example of drop-out learner. He is a young immigrant who lives alone with little family support. He is a high-risk learner who faces pressures both socially and financially. These pressures have meant that Huy has joined and dropped-out of the Bridge Program on more than one occasion. However, Huy has remained in contact with the program since he first came to us. He has demonstrated a genuine interest in coming back to the program and is keen to ensure that it will accept him again once he is ready to return. He recognises his need for the program even though he lacks the readiness skills to commit to it over a sustained period of time. His requests to return to the program are on his own initiative, and the Bridge Program team is hopeful that he will return and stay to complete his studies.

Learners face many challenges and pressures to drop out. This chapter explores how programs can provide the support learners need to stay in school and succeed.

Action Areas

Identify Barriers and Needed Support.....page 72

Build In Academic Support.....page 77

Build In Social Support.....page 84

Help Learners Overcome Their Barrierspage 87

Identify Barriers and Needed Support

Action Items

- Work to identify common barriers that learners in your program struggle with.
- Think holistically about the barriers learners have and the support they need academically and socially/personally to overcome those barriers.

In the Bridge Program, we have found that much of our learners' ability to stay in school and succeed hinges on whether or not they get the academic and social support they need to manage and overcome their barriers. We cannot stress enough what a difference it makes for learners to receive the kind of support we describe here. Helping learners overcome barriers is not an easy task. It is an ongoing challenge for the Bridge Program. We hope that the model and examples we offer here assist your program to develop its own way of addressing these critical issues for learners.

Undoubtedly, the success of your learners depends on it.

Common barriers

Young adults who are considered at risk, who have low literacy skills, and who are learning English as another language, face many barriers to participation in post-high school programming. These barriers often prevent learners from accessing or participating in programs. Learners may face financial, legal, health, social, emotional, and employment issues. They may also face language and cultural concerns, family

and personal problems, educational processes and bureaucracies that are difficult to navigate, plus schedules and procedures that can be daunting and often prohibitive.

Here are the most common types of barriers that learners face:

- Psychological Barriers which includes lack of support systems, emotional or personal issues, and fear of the unknown.
- Physical Barriers which includes financial issues, housing issues, and transportation issues.
- Social Barriers which includes employment issues, scheduling issues, legal issues, child care issues, and physical and mental health issues.

Successful programs need to be more than just sensitive to these barriers. Programs need to be diligent and proactive in helping learners recognize issues, access resources, manage processes, understand conditions of support, anticipate issues, and plan for independent navigation of the services they need in the future. It is challenging to help young adults manage and overcome their multiple and diverse barriers to learning. In order to give the necessary support to tackle these issues, it is important to look holistically at learners in the program. Not only do programs need to understand how critical such support is for learner participation and success, programs also need the strategies, processes, creativity, and commitment to deliver that support.

Sometimes barriers are easy to recognize. They may be apparent based on learners' visible circumstances, or they may be disclosed by learners who are aware and forthcoming about them. For example, a pregnant teen that is tired all the time and does not have maternity clothing has some barriers that are explicit and visible. The challenge is to try to reduce the barriers that may make her struggle or that may prevent her from accessing her program. For example, help her find low cost maternity clothing, connect her to pre-natal support programs, and allow her to attend part-time classes.

Other times, however, the barriers that learners face are more subtle or ambiguous. They may be invisible to others or even to the learners themselves who are unaware of the patterns or circumstances that are preventing them from accessing programs. For example, learners may have financial issues that are not entirely apparent. Others may have a veiled fear of the unknown that they have not recognized

but that thwarts their attempts to access new programs and services. The challenge here is even greater.

Programs need to anticipate these kinds of barriers and be creative and proactive in addressing them. Recognizing hidden barriers is difficult and takes a certain amount of insight and sensitivity. Often, if learners are allowed time to discuss their situations and feelings there is a better chance of discovering a hidden barrier. The student advisors and student support workers are particularly helpful in this regard.

Holistic thinking

Our learners face many barriers, or obstacles, that make it difficult for them to access programs and services. Here are a few examples of learners who have come to the Bridge Program with barriers. They are composite sketches to illustrate the barriers that our learners face, but they are not exaggerations. They ring true to our experience over the years.

Arnold was very anxious when he started high school two years ago. It was difficult to go to school in Canada, but his ESL teacher was really nice. She did many things for him and helped him a lot. This summer, Arnold turned 20 so now he cannot go to high school. He cannot take ESL classes with his teacher. His school is the only school he knows. He has heard of a college downtown, but he does not know anyone there and cannot get there by himself. Once, a college teacher came to his class and talked about a special program there, but he did not write down the name or the phone number. He needs help but he does not know what to do.



Some of Arnold's barriers include:

- Fear of the unknown
- Lack of support systems
- Lack of strategies to find new information

Nyakot used to walk to her local high school but now she is no longer eligible for high school. Last year, she tried the work experience program for youth at her local immigrant serving agency. She tried her best but she had to do a lot of writing and speaking. It was too difficult, so she quit. Now she is thinking about going to college, but it's too far to walk and she cannot afford a monthly bus pass. She feels lost and might just look for a job instead.



Some of Nyakot's barriers include:

- Financial issues
- Transportation issues

Sara, a low-income, 20-year-old single mom, lives with her aunt and uncle. She takes care of her baby during the day and works part-time as a cleaner at night when her aunt can baby-sit. Before she had the baby, Sara was in high school ESL classes. Now she is too old to go back to high school and her English skills are too low to get into upgrading classes. She wants to continue her education, but she does not know what to do.



Some of Sara's barriers include:

- Low income
- Childcare issues
- Scheduling issues

Richard is in the college transition program for young adult literacy learners. He likes it and he is learning, but he has a problem. The judge said he has to pay \$500 and do 100 hours of community service. He might also get evicted from his apartment. He does not have enough money so he might need to quit school and get a full-time job. He does not know how to fill out a job application form though. And he cannot read the newspaper or bulletin boards to find a job. He is frustrated and confused.



Some of Richard's barriers include:

- Legal issues
- Housing issues
- Financial issues

As we work with different learners, we see many of the same barriers recurring, but we also see new barriers, too. As your program develops its own sense of the barriers facing your learners, you will likely notice similar barriers and other challenges that are specific to your local community. For example, in Calgary, housing issues are extremely common and quite difficult among our learners right now, whereas jobs are plentiful. These local conditions contribute to the kinds of barriers that learners face, so programs must be grounded in their community and attentive to its changing context.

In our experience, it is rare to find a learner who has only one barrier to overcome. We have found that most of our learners present us with the challenge of multiple barriers. Of course, this is an ongoing challenge. We have found that we cannot simply “fix” the problem and then move on. Nor can we get the learners to “fix” their problems and move on. These barriers are complex, living scenarios that learners need help to “manage” rather than “fix”. They need strategies, reminders, support and ongoing coaching to understand and control their own situations.

Build In Academic Support

Action Items

- Hire student advisors.
- Help learners set long-term and short-term goals that are realistic and achievable.
- Help learners understand the concept of pre-requisites.
- Help learners develop a clearer, realistic understanding of their educational level.
- Help learners see and understand the steps they need to take to reach their goals.
- Help learners see and understand the approximate timeframes required to reach their goals.
- Hold 3-way meetings with learners at regular intervals during the program.

Student advisors

A student advisor is a member of the program team who meets with learners individually and in small groups to offer support and guidance in matters related to the learners' academic achievement. Advisors help learners understand academic

requirements and help them navigate the educational system. They help learners set short and long term goals. They work with learners to develop career plans, explore the various pathways to those careers, and understand both the opportunities and challenges that lie ahead of them on those paths. Young adult literacy learners often have neither the knowledge nor the skills to navigate the education system alone, and the support they receive during the advisor meetings is vital to their future educational success. The guidance and support of student advisors can have a dramatic impact on learners' academic achievement and sense of confidence in being a member of a post-secondary program. For more information on student advisors and their role, see "Hire Student Support Workers" in the "Build In Social Support" section of this chapter.

Long-term and short-term goals

In the Bridge Program, learners work with a student advisor to map out their long-term career and educational goals. Through regular one-on-one meetings, learners and advisors create individual action plans. These action plans outline the major steps learners must take in order to reach their long term goals. They include such things as possible career programs, the pre-requisites needed to enter those programs, and the approximate timeline that would likely be required. The advisor uses the action plan to help the learners understand the steps required to reach their goals. Learners keep their action plans in their portfolios and are encouraged to refer to them often, to bring them to their Bridge Program advising sessions, and to use them in the future in other programs. During their time in the Bridge Program, learners often have their action plans updated and modified to reflect their current situations. We have found that action plans provide an excellent, visual information source to help learners understand what is needed to reach their long term goals. Action plans have resonated well with learners and are a fundamental element in our efforts to help learners transition to further education and feel successful.



See the Tool Box at the end of this chapter for:

- Sample Learner Action Plan

The advisor also provides learners with information about careers and job industries related to the learners' interests. For example, if a learner wants to be a doctor or a nurse, the advisor discusses those and other options in health care, such as health care technicians and aides. This broadens the learners' knowledge of career opportunities and can open doors to more achievable goals for the near future.

In the Bridge Program, learners set short term goals to improve their reading, writing, strategies, and essential skills. With ongoing coaching and support from the student advisor, learners identify their intended short term goals. The learners, the advisor, and the instructors all keep a copy of these goals available for reference and reinforcement. Over a short period of time, learners work toward those goals with encouragement from the instructors and advisor. Then, the learners meet the advisor again to assess their progress and set new goals. The advisor celebrates their successes with them and encourages them to modify goals that are too ambitious or not focused enough.

The need for short term goal setting with learners in the Bridge Program came out of our experience with long term goal setting. We found that long term goals, though successful in helping learners understand expectations and pre-requisites, were often too long term to show much progress month by month, or even semester by semester. Learners needed to witness their own progress and feel success more frequently than that. In response to this need, we established short term goal setting.

The ongoing support for short term goal setting has several benefits. Learners see progress and feel successful in their learning. They practice setting realistic and practical goals. They also get advice and support from the advisor to choose appropriate actions that will actually help improve their language, literacy, and essential skills. This helps them learn how to learn. Another benefit is that advisors can encourage specific goals for learners who are experiencing particular difficulties. For example, the advisor might strongly recommend that a learner who is often late set a short term goal of being on time every day for 3 weeks. For a short period of time, this goal may be possible. It stretches them and allows them to gradually develop the habits, strategies, and confidence they need to be successful in school and work.



See the Tool Box at the end of this chapter for:

- Sample Short Term Goals

Pre-requisites

In the post-secondary world of educational programming, the concept of achieving pre-requisites is a critical idea to comprehend. Entrance into programs such as high school upgrading and career programs depends heavily on learners being able to demonstrate that they have completed the necessary pre-requisites. Often pre-requisites are the biggest determiner of entrance into any kind of program.

One main stumbling block for many learners in transition programs is their pre-conceived notion that in order to achieve any kind of career goal they must first complete a high school diploma. Given the reality of the pre-requisite system, this is simply not true for many career programs.

It is challenging to help learners revise their perception that a high school diploma is the first thing they need to achieve in their post-secondary educational journey. Here again, the student advisor plays an important role in helping learners understand that many career programming options do not require a high school diploma but rather specific pre-requisite high school courses. For example, to enter an automotive technician program, learners do not need a high school diploma, but they do need to have completed certain grade 11 and grade 12 subjects.

With the concept of pre-requisites, advisors preserve the careful balancing act necessary to keep learners grounded in realistically achievable and practical plans given limitations of time and funding while still encouraging their desires to achieve a high school diploma someday.

Help learners understand their level

Many young adult literacy learners have little understanding of the levels of language, literacy, strategy use, essential skills, and college readiness that are required

to be successful in post-secondary educational programming. This is not surprising, however, given their often limited exposure to high school content courses and their lack of a reference point to other successful learners' levels. We have found that our learners quite often know that they are not at the level of other college students their age, but they rarely have a realistic view of what their actual level is.

Part of the academic support that literacy learners need, therefore, is to understand their level. They need help to recognize what they are able to do, what they are not yet doing successfully, and what they need to learn how to do next. This support should be offered as a means of encouraging and empowering learners to understand where they are and where they need to go next. For some learners, getting a clearer understanding of their actual language and literacy levels can be discouraging. However, with sensitivity and good planning, programs can help learners understand their levels without making them feel overwhelmed at how far it is they need to go. One way to do this is to use benchmarks to describe aspects of learners' levels. Showing learners what benchmark level they are at and helping them focus on getting to the next benchmark level is key to helping them feel a sense of direction and purpose in their learning.

Help learners understand steps they need to take

Navigating the post-secondary education system is challenging for many post-secondary learners. One difficulty that many learners and other stakeholders encounter is the pre-conceived notion that there are very limited numbers of rigid pathways into post-secondary programs. In many cases, this is not true. There may be multiple pathways or unexpected pathways leading to career programs. Learners need help from student advisors to see the steps that are possible for them to get to their long term goals. Often, as advisors work with learners to develop long term action plans, learners are surprised and find unexpected pathways into further educational programs. For example, many learners think that their first step must be to complete a high school diploma and then move on to a career program. With assistance, learners often find that a high school diploma may not be required for entry into the career program of their

choice. Other learners may indicate that they want to finish learning English first, and then move on to a career program. Helping learners understand the steps they need to take, therefore, often involves helping them focus on the importance of pre-requisites, re-think pathways in post-secondary school, understand the concept of lifelong learning, and recognize their own strengths and weaknesses.

In the Bridge Program, we have developed a long term action plan that includes a visual representation, showing learners the steps they need to take to reach their goals. We have found that even using a simple visual can really help de-mystify the educational path ahead for learners.



See the Tool Box at the end of this chapter for:

- Sample Learner Action Plan

Help learners understand timeframes

Inevitably, as learners work with advisors to map out their long term goals and the steps they need to take, learners ask how long it will take for them to complete the steps and reach their goals. This is important information that learners need to understand, and yet it can be a difficult reality for them to fully comprehend. Because many learners have no reference point to judge their own skill level and because they often do not have an intricate knowledge of the post-secondary school system, learners can be quite shocked to find out how long it will take for them to reach their goals. Advisors must be keenly sensitive to learners' feelings and must tread carefully as they discuss timeframes with learners. Despite the delicate balancing act that advisors must perform, it is very important for learners to get a sense of the timeframe involved and understand the implications of those timeframes. Only then can learners start to make more informed choices regarding their future.

Often, learners will start with quite ambitious career goals, but they are unaware of the educational requirements, funding, and time needed to reach those goals. Through frequent, ongoing coaching and support, advisors help learners understand time and funding limitations that impact their educational and career plans. Again, in a

delicate balancing act, advisors encourage learners to plan for more attainable goals in the near future while keeping their longer-term, more ambitious goals for the distant future. For example, one lower level literacy learner in the Bridge Program came to her initial advisor meeting with dreams of one day being a doctor. The advisor commended the learner on such a career goal and discussed the reasons that the learner was interested in that kind of work. Then, gently, the advisor helped the learner understand the timeframe for her to complete the education required to become a practicing medical doctor. The advisor suggested that, based on time and funding limitations, the learner should look into other health care related careers that require less schooling. Together, they explored the field of health care and found a 2-year college certificate program that the learner could complete much sooner. This temporary compromise allowed the learner to work towards a more realistic health-related career that was attainable in the next few years while still holding on to her dream of returning to school to become a doctor later in life.

3-way meetings

It is important that the whole program team collaborate to support learners and help them succeed. Part of this collaboration is achieved through regular 3-way meetings held at several intervals during the semester. These meetings are conducted with three people present: an individual learner, that learner's instructor, and the student advisor. Other people may also be present depending upon time and resources. During these meetings, all three people discuss the learner's short and long term goals and his or her demonstrated progress toward the goals. In addition, other matters, such as classroom performance and its effect on the learner's overall progress, are also considered. The 3-way meetings are an ideal forum for general discussion of learner performance, short and long term goal setting, and the raising of any concerns from the learner, his or her instructor, or the student advisor.



See the Tool Box at the end of this chapter for:

- 3-Way Meeting Form

Build In Social Support

Action Items

- Develop a process to address learners' barriers.
- Hire student support workers to meet with learners and to ease pressure on instructors.
- Ensure that learners' needs are communicated to the whole team as needed.

A process to address barriers

Over time, our program has learned that there are no quick fixes when it comes to overcoming barriers. We have, however, developed a simple approach to dealing with learner barriers that helps us:

- address the issue in a positive way,
- focus on resources that are already available to the learner,
- build learners' independence and self-confidence.

This approach is described in detail in the Tool Box.

The Bridge Program is always looking for new ways to reduce barriers. Many of these ways involve creative ideas that look at challenging situations in a new light. Many of these situations have required us to broaden our ideas about what our program can and should do to support learners. We encourage you to do the same kind of thinking as your program works to overcome the barriers that your learners face.



See the Tool Box at the end of this chapter for:

- Process to Help Address Learner Barriers

Hire student support workers

Student support workers assist learners with their social and personal issues. They offer support and assistance with issues such as finding a place to live, arranging child care, accessing health care services, securing suitable employment, and managing learners' work schedules to fit with school. They also provide referral services to help learners access counselling and other services they need that are available in the community. Although these issues may seem somewhat removed from academic concerns, they have a dramatic affect on learners' ability to stay in school and succeed. In the Bridge Program, we have found it invaluable to have a member of the program team dedicated to helping learners become more independent and self-sufficient at dealing with these issues.

Student support workers and student advisors work closely together on the team to help learners address their issues as quickly and effectively as possible. As with all members of the program team, the student advisors and the student support workers reinforce the various elements of the program, such as the importance of college readiness, the use of strategies, and the ability to demonstrate essential skills. When learners consistently hear the same messages from the entire program team, there is a greater chance of that message having a long-term impact. The advisors and support workers also help learners become independent, giving them the support they need to learn how to become proactive rather than reactive with issues that arise both in and out of school.

Student advisors and support workers play a critical role in supporting learners and allowing them to stay in school. In the Bridge Program, these roles developed as a response to the pressure that instructors were facing. We found that without the roles of advisor and support worker, instructors were constantly forced to deal with learner issues that impacted, both directly and indirectly, the learners' ability to stay in school. These issues were clearly vital to learners' success, but they were putting too much pressure on instructors and reducing the time they had to teach the curriculum. Since incorporating advisors and student support workers into the program team, the Bridge

Program has been able to provide the support that many learners needed to stay in school, transition, and succeed.

Communicating learners' needs to the team

Good communication between all the members of the program team is a vital part of providing adequate support to learners. Often, one member of the team is in a better position to recognise an issue affecting a learner than another member, but they may not be the best person to help deal with that issue. In addition, if all members of the team are made aware of learners' needs, they can all respond appropriately, no matter what their relationship with learners. By ensuring that the program team has the resources and structures in place to facilitate this kind of ongoing communication, programs help ensure that learners have their needs recognized, feel supported by the program, and get the assistance they need to address the issues they are facing.

Help Learners Overcome Their Barriers

Action Items

- Remember to think of learners holistically when addressing their psychological, physical, and social barriers.
- Respond to the full range of learners' needs.
- Be creative and flexible in finding new ways to address learners' barriers.

Think of learners holistically

Ultimately, a transition program designed for young adult literacy learners must support its participants in ways that may not be considered traditional. Support must come in the form of a team of dedicated professionals who are concerned with the educational needs of the learners as well as their overall welfare. Without this type and level of concern, it is all too easy for these at-risk learners to become so overwhelmed by their life challenges that they miss out on the opportunities the program offers to help them reach their educational and career goals. Ensure learners receive the guidance they need to deal with the issues that put them at-risk now, are coached in ways that promote independence and self-reliance, and are provided with an environment that will encourage them to learn, grow, and prepare for the future.

Learners should be given a role, some form of responsibility, in solving their problems. In addition, there should be an expectation that they report back as to what steps they have taken and what the outcomes of their actions are. The process of helping learners find solutions to their problems should be a partnership. This

arrangement allows learners to still feel in control of their lives while receiving the advice and guidance they often desperately need.

Another key element in overcoming barriers is the need for on-going support, and therefore the student advisor must work closely and regularly with all learners. The advisor provides the information and guidance learners need in order to manage the issues they are dealing with and to find appropriate solutions. Just as learners' challenges are many and varied, so the program's help must come in many and varied ways. For example, without a job many learners cannot contemplate staying in school, but they often lack the necessary skills to find a suitable job on their own. In this situation, the student advisor can help a learner look for a job, in the classified ads of the local newspaper for example, help create a resume, and give some coaching in interviewing skills. At every stage of the process the learner is involved and is encouraged to take the lead as often as is appropriate. Another common challenge facing learners is poor nutrition. In this instance, the student advisor can work with learners to set up their own breakfast program, liaise with instructors to incorporate health topics such as "healthy meals on a budget" and "comparison shopping" in the curriculum, or arrange for the program to provide food vouchers for the most needy.

In the Bridge Program, we strive to provide appropriate advice and guidance to learners so that they may focus on their studies in a safe and supportive environment, and one that is conducive to developing their literacy and life skills. The program effectively guides learners to the resources and services in the community that they need while also building their confidence and independence. We believe it is vital to not simply offer short-term solutions to problems, even though this is often what learners initially expect or want. We consider it vital to give learners the support and guidance they need in the short term while simultaneously helping them to acquire the skills they need to help themselves in the longer term.

Our key approach is to build independence in learners, rather than to encourage dependence on others. Learners certainly depend on us for support, especially when they first join the program, but they are involved with every step taken by the program to

help them with an issue. Learners are expected to take an active role in the process, rather than passively sitting back while their problem or concern is handled for them.

Respond to the full range of needs

Learners' needs can be wide and varied, so programs must be prepared to offer a wide and varied range of support. Having the answer to every learner issue is not always possible or even desirable. The key is to be prepared to help learners find the answer and deal with the issue accordingly. Programs must be willing to deal with whatever a learner is dealing with or they run the risk of that learner dropping out. At times, programs may need to work intensely with learners over a long period of time to help them deal with their needs. At other times, simply offering a referral to an outside agency which has expertise that the program lacks is the best response a program can give. To respond to the full range of learners' needs, programs need to be creative and think of innovative ways to offer learners more structured support. Examples include regularly scheduled offerings such as a breakfast program for learners who are not receiving proper nutrition, individualized help with reading, writing, and homework, and brown bag lunch series of workshops where learners bring lunch and work in small groups with support to address specific needs such as anger management or strategies for controlling personal finances. Whatever form the support takes, it is crucial for programs to be proactive in identifying learners' needs, creative in addressing those needs, and diligent in making learners aware of the support available to them.



See the Tool Box at the end of this chapter for:

- Addressing Psychological Barriers
- Addressing Physical Barriers
- Addressing Social Barriers

Be creative and flexible

Responding to learners' needs and helping them overcome their barriers is not an easy task. At times, it requires creativity and flexibility to find new ways to support learners and to help them recognize, understand, and address their barriers. It also

takes quite a commitment on the part of the program to build the structures and devote the resources necessary to help learners overcome their barriers.

In the Bridge Program, our strategies to help support and retain learners have evolved over the years. As we continue to meet new learners and witness the impressive gains they can make when they can overcome their barriers, our commitment to supporting and retaining learners becomes even stronger.

There have been challenges, however, that have made it difficult for our program to find a way to reduce barriers. We have found that some barriers are easier to reduce than others. This section contains three examples of challenges that our program has faced or is still facing. As you read the examples below, we hope you can see that your program is not alone in facing ongoing, evolving challenges. As these examples illustrate, the process of helping learners overcome barriers is a demanding one. Through these challenges, and many more, we have learned that even though being responsive to learner needs is demanding, it is vital for learner retention and success.

Example 1: Transportation issues

For a short time, our college had an arrangement with our local city transit department which gave all full-time students a semester-long bus pass for a small fee. At that time, the Bridge Program was small and so we were able to subsidize the fee for all our learners who could not afford it. But then the arrangement with the transit department ceased, and so college students paid full adult price for bus tickets and passes. As our program grew and we had more learners, it became impossible for the program to subsidize all learners who could not afford the transit passes. We started using other methods to help learners manage their transportation costs and issues, but we still had access to some funding for a transportation subsidy. The challenge was to answer many questions about how to manage that subsidy.

These are the kinds of questions we are working on. Who should qualify for the subsidy? Should we ask those who receive the subsidy to pay a small amount? How much should learners pay? Should the payment be the same for all learners or should it depend on ability to pay? And what criteria should we use to determine ability to pay?

How stringent should we be with the subsidies? Should it be tied to attendance? If so, how can we make that system manageable and who would manage it? Should the subsidy cover monthly bus passes (with unlimited rides for the calendar month) or just tickets for individual rides to and from school? If our program continues to grow, how should we amend our subsidy structure to help learners continue to access our program?

Example 2: Employment issues

When we first started the program, we offered support for learners at the beginning of the semester to help them find appropriate part-time work. We taught them the vocabulary of job ads, we helped them look through newspapers, we discussed why certain jobs and schedules would be better than others, and we helped them create resumes and fill out application forms.

What we quickly learned was that this kind of support is needed, but certainly not enough. Learners also needed help with following through on their plans. They might finish the application form but never drop it off. Or they might not know how to drop it off and what to say. They also needed help in deciphering addresses and reading bus schedules to make sure they could get to the locations advertised in the job ads.

Additionally, learners did not just need help applying for a job, they needed help keeping a job, balancing work and school, understanding expectations at work, managing their time, and making good decisions about when to leave a job.

We have found that supporting learners with employment issues is not a short-term task to complete, check off the list, and then forget. Learners need ongoing support such as regular meetings to check on their job search progress, opportunities to discuss issues at work, and instruction in the use of strategies to help balance work and school schedules. Supporting learners with employment issues presented us with more challenges than we had expected. It has meant that we need to rethink what support we need to offer and then we need to plan to offer that support on an ongoing basis.

Example 3: Scheduling issues

Our program began as a part-time program for learners. It later evolved into a full-time program with learners attending four full days a week. In an attempt to offer flexible scheduling so learners could work and go to school, we offered the flexibility of either full-time or part-time registration. Full-time learners came all day. Part-time learners came for the mornings only. This created certain challenges. We needed to structure the days so that if a learner came only in the mornings, they could keep up with classes and not miss half of everything the others learned. So again we evolved and offered project-based essential skills classes in the afternoons and thematic units with reading and writing and strategy focus in the mornings. We are now becoming a course-based program, so there is more evolution yet to come, and we continue to work on balancing flexible scheduling with institutional and funding-related attendance requirements.

Build Relationships

With High Schools and School Boards

- Maintain open communication with schools and school boards to stay abreast of learners' needs and barriers.

With Community Resources

- Refer learners to resources and services in the community for support and assistance.
- Invite community members, such as police and health care workers, into the program to connect with learners and help address their needs.
- Develop partnerships with agencies who can offer ongoing support such as a student support worker.

Within Your Own Institution

- Refer learners to internal resources and services in the institution, such as college counsellors, for support and assistance.
- Understand requirements and pre-requisites of other programs within your institution to ensure advisors have accurate information when helping learners set goals.
- Meet with internal fund developers to establish scholarships or other financial support for learners.

With Other Post-Secondary Institutions

- Understand requirements and pre-requisites of other institutions' programs to ensure advisors have accurate information to help learners set goals.

With Governments and Funders

- Meet with external funders to establish scholarships or other forms of financial support for learners.

Tool Box

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Sample Learner Action Plan

Advisors help learners set long term goals and create action plans like this. Make sure learners receive a copy.

Action Plan for (name of learner)

Program Entry Date: **Jan 2006** Date of Action Plan: **March 7, 2006**

Short-term Goal Requirements:	Improve reading and writing to enter Advanced Bridge Program class Read at GE level 3 independently (or higher) Write complete sentences with good grammar, punctuation, vocabulary and spelling Be able to speak and express yourself fairly easily and with confidence
Medium Term Goal Requirements:	Enter BOW VALLEY COLLEGE Basic Education/Upgrading Level 4 Read independently at GE level 7 or higher Write well-organized paragraphs/essays with topic sentences, supporting ideas, good grammar, and advanced vocabulary Increase speed and accuracy in reading, writing and test-taking Increase use of strategies to become more independent in reading and writing
Long Term Goal Requirements:	Complete levels 4 and 5 in Basic Education; then enter New Opportunities for Work (NOW) Office program Demonstrate a Grade 10 reading level (complete Basic Education level 5)

Notes:

Action Plan (cont'd)

<u>Steps to Goal:</u>	<u>Dates:</u>
10. Complete program and apply to work in an office in the health care field.	June 2009
9. Take the 10-month "New Opportunities" program	September 2008
8. Meet with Career Advisor to apply for Bow Valley College's "New Opportunities for Work – Office" program and funding.	August 2008
7. Take Basic Education Level 5	January 2008
6. Take Basic Education Level 4	September 2007
5. Meet Career Advisor to apply for upgrading/funding	May 2007
4. Take 2 nd Upgrading test (try to enter Basic Education level 4)	May 2007
3. Year 2 Bridge Program	2006-2007
2. Take Upgrading test	May 2006
1. Year 1 Bridge Program	2005-2006

Sample Short Term Goals

Advisors guide learners to set short term goals and can use a form like this to record them. Make sure learners receive a copy.

Short-Term Goals

Learner Name: _____ Date: _____

<u>Completion Date</u>	<u>Goals</u>
	<p><u>Reading</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• read 10 minutes at home 3 times every week
	<p><u>Writing</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• write one correct sentence every day and show it to your teacher• check your word list for the correct spelling of vocabulary words
	<p><u>Strategies</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• check your word list for the correct spelling of vocabulary words
	<p><u>Essential Skills</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• teamwork: respect all members of the class by listening to their ideas• managing time: stay focused on your work in class (do not use your headphones)
	<p><u>College Readiness</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• be on time every day for the next 2 weeks (be sitting in the class a few minutes before 9:00am)• participate in group discussions more by sharing your ideas

learner

instructor

student advisor

3-Way Meeting Form

Use a form like this to record information during 3-way meetings. Make sure that learners receive a copy and use it to set short-term goals.

Learner Name: _____

ID#: _____

Date of entry to program: _____

Program Pre-Test Results: _____

Current Reading/Writing Levels: _____

Strengths:

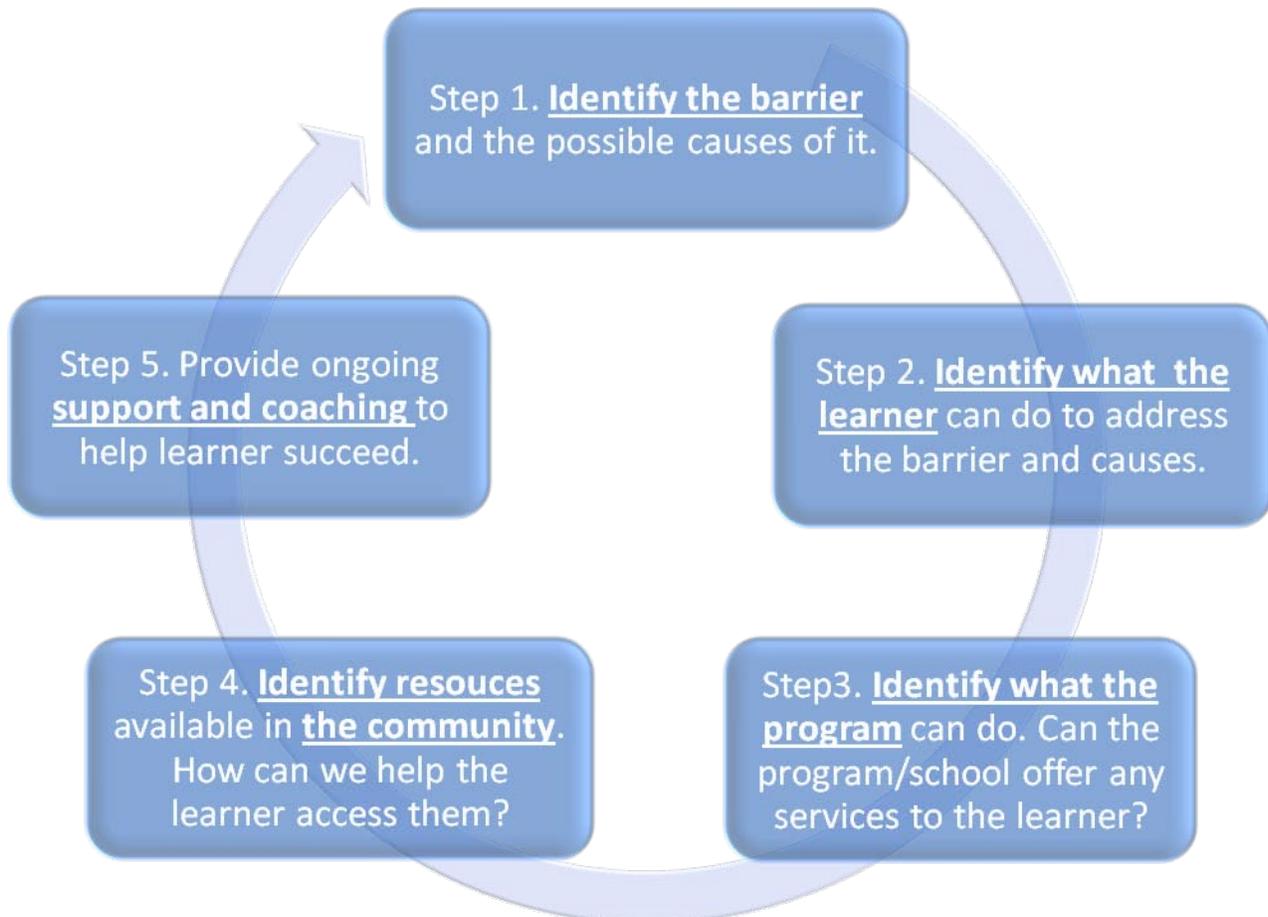
Areas to improve:

Plan to address areas to improve:

Signatures: _____

Date: _____

Process to Help Address Learner Barriers



Step 1 Identify the barrier and the possible causes of it

As indicated in the diagram, our approach is not static. It is an ongoing process that guides our thinking and actions when dealing with the ever-changing landscape of learner barriers. It is not a strict or unidirectional process either. Sometimes when we work with learners we jump from one part of the process to another and return to parts

we have already worked through in order to bring new information or understanding to the situation. For example, we may work with the learner to identify one specific barrier, and after working through some of the steps in the process we realize that there are other underlying barriers that contribute to the learners' challenges. We then return to identify those barriers and continue working through the process, repeating some steps as necessary, to address the learners' needs.

Also, as part of our approach to barriers, we focus not just on the barrier itself but on the underlying causes. This helps us avoid simple band-aid solutions that only address the barrier for a short time and do nothing to help the learner understand what causes the barrier or how to break free of that cycle. For example, if the learner is involved in the justice system because of an assault charge, then simply helping the learner access legal assistance to deal with the temporary situation of the charge is not enough. We can also support the learner to access community or school resources such as counseling that may be able to help the learner deal with the underlying cause of the current situation.

Step 2 Identify what the learner can do

When working to overcome learner barriers, as much as possible, we try to focus on what the learners can do for themselves. This kind of thinking places responsibility with the learner and makes them the central actor in the process of overcoming their barriers. We are merely supportive players that guide them, but they are the ones who are responsible for making it happen. This responsibility is often a new kind of experience for learners and it can make them feel uncomfortable. However, it can also empower learners and help them work toward independence in their new context of adult education. For example, if financial issues are proving to be a barrier for learners, we help them understand that virtually all post-secondary learners need to work to support themselves through school. We help learners understand the benefits of working part-time as a student, the difficulties of balancing work and school, and the necessity of managing your time and supporting yourself throughout your post-

secondary educational life. Sometimes this includes helping learners understand the value and costs of education.

Step 3 Identify what the program can do

Another step in our approach is to focus on how the program can help learners. What kind of support do they need to address their barriers? For example, do they need more flexible scheduling for a short time? Do they need the services of the student support worker? Do they need short-term financial support in the form of transportation subsidies or food vouchers from the program? These are the kinds of services and support we try to offer learners as part of their process of overcoming barriers. Of course, there are many implications of offering services and support like this. We need to be aware of and address such questions as, how much support should one learner receive? With limited resources, how do we decide who gets what kind of support? How do we ensure that we are not encouraging dependence in learners? These are some of the challenges we face as we try to balance supporting learners on the one hand and encouraging responsibility and independence on the other.

To help us become more aware of what we can do to help learners, our program is committed to ongoing critical evaluation of our own processes or assumptions that may put learners at a disadvantage. This kind of reflection happens at a program level. Its purpose is to reduce hidden barriers that are created by the program itself. For example, this kind of reflection made us recognize that several learners were leaving the program before June so they could work full time in good summer jobs that started at the end of May. Reflecting on this situation caused our program to change our end dates from the middle of June to the middle of May. This has allowed our learners to get an even start on the summer job market as compared to other post-secondary students. Self-reflection and evaluation of this kind is challenging for any program and often requires discussion and debate about our fundamental values and beliefs at a program level. It also requires creative thinking to help our program be flexible within our mandated requirements. While challenging, we have found this kind of reflection and evaluation to be a worthwhile endeavor that is crucial to the ongoing success of our program and to the process of helping learners overcome barriers.

Step 4 Identify resources available in the community

Many times our learners need guidance to learn what services are available to them, so as part of our approach to addressing learner barriers we work to connect learners to community resources. For example, learners are often unaware of certain programs that they can access such as health care premium waivers, or low income bus pass subsidies.

Becoming familiar with the resources available in the community is an ongoing process that takes time and commitment to realize. In the Bridge Program, we have found that the more we learn about our community and the resources available in it, the better we are able to not only refer learners to appropriate community connections but prepare them for their experiences there. We know that we are not a referral centre, but the more help we can provide to learners to guide them to appropriate services, the better chance we have of keeping those learners in school. We also feel that our learners are often misunderstood or given less attention than they need because of their seeming ability to understand everything. What often goes unnoticed in short visits to community service centres, is that these learners have huge gaps in their skill levels, and even though they may *seem* to understand everything, they do not actually have all the skills necessary to complete the tasks required. With this in mind, we try to prepare learners so that when they go to those service centres they ask the right questions and they are tenacious in getting the help they need.

Step 5 Provide ongoing support and coaching

We also recognize that learners need more than just a connection to community resources. They need ongoing coaching and support to access those resources. For example, it is not enough for our program to tell a learner that our college has counseling services available to them, we need to make sure they know how to get there, what to ask for, and what to expect in terms of processes such as scheduling appointments and confidentiality. In the same way, it is not enough to inform learners

that they can apply for health care insurance premium subsidies or waivers. They also need help finding the forms, filling them out, and understanding the conditions of support that come with such subsidies. (Conditions of support include, for example, eligibility requirements, the need to have filed their income taxes for the previous year, and the fact that if their family situation or income changes, they need to inform Alberta Health.)

Helping learners know what resources are available and how to access them is often still not enough support to ensure success. Learners often need a step-by-step plan outlining what to do and when to do it. And many learners also need some pressure to get it done. We have found that drawing up a simple plan and then conducting follow-up meetings helps hold learners accountable. With so many demands placed on them, learners can often let things go undone for a long time. For example, even if they have had a meeting with us to find out about health care subsidies or getting taxes done, learners often avoid the next step (applying for the subsidy, or going to the tax office for assistance) because it is challenging or time-consuming. They may not act quickly, or at all, on the information they have learned unless they know they are going to be held accountable by the program. Part of helping learners to be independent is being there to check up on them and see that they have carried through with the steps in their plan to access the resources and support they need. Our approach includes this kind of ongoing support and coaching.

The five step model outlined above is a work in progress. We continue to use it daily in our work with learners, and we have found that it helps us stay positive, proactive, focused on available resources, and tuned in to the needs and challenges of our learners. It also keeps us focused on building learners' independence and self-confidence by helping them see that they are the primary actors in resolving their issues, and that with support and coaching there are concrete steps they can take to break down and manage their barriers.

Addressing Psychological Barriers

Below are action items to address the common psychological barriers that often prevent learners from accessing educational programming, namely:

- fear of the unknown
- lack of support systems
- personal or emotional issues

Certain action items offer further suggestions. The lists are not exhaustive.

Fear of the Unknown

Identify potential learners early on and develop connections to the schools or agencies that serve them.

- Go into the schools before the end of the school year to help potential learners begin planning for their next steps.
- Ensure that other service providers (schools, agencies, etc.) understand your program and its specific target audience.

Develop transition strategies to help ease learners into and out of program.

- Get to know potential learners in their familiar surroundings so they can develop a relationship with and personal connection to your program and institution.
- Offer college tours or special days where potential learners can get to know your program and institution before they transition.

Make your processes and policies as transparent as possible so learners can understand them.

Lack of Support Systems

- Hire a student advisor to support learners and take pressure off instructors.
- Help learners recognize the support systems they already have, and help them develop a broader network of support.
 - Consider bringing in speakers from social service agencies.
 - Connect learners to referral agencies or other service providers.
 - Consider using visuals such as concept maps or flowcharts to help learners see the support networks available to them.
- Teach learners to use strategies when looking for information or services.
 - Teach strategies such as asking others to write information down for them, asking questions to clarify information, and developing a system at home to keep important papers in a safe place.
 - Encourage learners to keep personal information on hand when filling out forms in offices or service centres.

Personal or Emotional Issues

Connect learners to personal counseling and mental health services.

- Follow up to ensure learners get the services they need.

Partner with community organizations to offer trained student liaisons or support workers.

Addressing Physical Barriers

Below are action items to address the common physical barriers that often prevent learners from accessing educational programming, namely:

- financial issues
- health issues
- housing issues
- transportation issues

Certain action items offer further suggestions. The lists are not exhaustive.

Financial Issues

Secure funding for learners' tuition and living allowance.

- Encourage funders to recognize the impact a living allowance would have on potential learners' ability to participate in the program.
- Cite learner testimony as well as research and statistical information to strengthen your argument for a funded living allowance.

If no living allowance is available, build emergency funds into the program to help learners in crisis.

- Consider using vouchers for emergency funds rather than cheques or cash for learners.
- Will you ask learners to prove financial need? If so, how?

Health Issues

Encourage learners to access and fully utilize health care services available to them.

- Help learners find and access low-cost medical services from providers such as dentists and optometrists.

Help learners understand and navigate the health care insurance system.

- Help them understand health care insurance costs.
- Help learners apply for health care subsidies

Teach learners simple strategies to stay healthy.

- Incorporate health-related themes into unit study.
- Invite health care professionals to visit the program as guest speakers.

Housing Issues

Offer learners support to find appropriate housing.

- Teach them strategies such as how to look for low-income housing, how to find a roommate, and how to apply for government-subsidized housing.
- Help learners get the assistance they need to complete personal income taxes, subsidy applications, and other required forms.

Transportation Issues

- Implement a transportation subsidy program to help learners pay for monthly bus passes.
- Help learners complete the requirements to apply for subsidized transit passes.
 - Help learners get the assistance they need to complete personal income taxes, subsidy applications, and other required forms.

Addressing Social Barriers

Below are action items to address the common physical barriers that often prevent learners from accessing educational programming, namely:

- employment issues
- scheduling issues
- legal issues
- child care issues

Certain action items offer further suggestions. The lists are not exhaustive.

Employment Issues

- Provide ongoing coaching on how to find and keep jobs.
 - Offer workshops or information sessions to groups of learners.
 - Consider teaching a thematic unit on employment.
- Help learners make good decisions about what kinds of jobs to look for now and in the future.
 - Encourage learners to consider their skills, talents, interests and abilities in long term employment plans
- Support learners in finding a balance of work and school.
 - Help learners recognize that most post-secondary students in Canada must work to pay for their school and living expenses.
 - Discuss the pressures and stresses of finding the balance between work and school.
 - Teach strategies to help learners manage time and workloads.

Scheduling Issues

Offer flexible scheduling so learners can work and go to school.

- Encourage learners to seek appropriate work schedules that do not conflict with school hours and do not prohibit participation in school.
- Encourage learners to make sure their employers know that they are students.

Create an attendance policy that supports learners to meet attendance requirements, rather than one that punishes them.

- Make the program flexible enough to allow learners to attend but ensure that expectations are clear.
- If attendance becomes a concern, have learners meet with an advisor to set short term goals for their attendance and discuss strategies to help them meet those goals.

Teach learners about mainstream cultural expectations of punctuality and attendance.

- Help learners recognize the consequences of being late or absent from school
- Offer incentives to recognize and reward good attendance and punctuality.

Legal Issues

- Offer learners information and resources to find low-cost legal assistance.
 - Develop information packages prepared especially for learners, or even BY learners, to help them understand the legal system and find assistance.
 - Consider building a thematic unit into the curriculum around law, crime, and the Canadian justice system.
- Teach learners how to navigate the justice system more independently.
 - Help learners understand that there are short-term AND long-term implications of tickets and criminal records.

Child Care Issues

- Offer childcare for learners, or help them find suitable options.
- Connect learners to services for pregnant/parenting teens.
 - Show them the location or take them to their first meeting of a teen parent support group.

Teach and Transition Learners

It is not enough for transition programs to identify, recruit, and support learners to help them stay in school. Programs must also provide an exceptionally strong program that focuses on what learners need in order to be successful in the next steps of their educational journey. Language and academic skills are critical, but as Maya's story shows, learners need much more to transition successfully.

Success Stories from the Bridge Program: Maya's Story

Maya had received very little formal education before coming to Canada, and when she joined the Bridge Program she was a quiet, shy girl with no goals and little understanding of the education system. From the beginning, Maya demonstrated good learning strategies and some independent study skills, but it was clear she needed help not only academically but also in confidence building and goal setting. Maya remained with the Bridge Program for two years and during this time made huge academic gains. In addition, she learned to effectively use a range of strategies and with the help of the student advisor was able to develop her educational goals. Being part of the program also helped Maya to boost her self esteem and to become a much more confident person.

Maya has successfully transitioned into upgrading at the college where she has recently finished Grade 12 English. She is a happy, self-assured learner now in the process of completing other upgrading classes. Once she has finished upgrading, Maya plans to enter a Pharmacy Technician Program.

Transition programs have a critical role to play in the lives of learners. This chapter explores how programs can rise up to the challenge and provide the well-designed, fully-supported learning environments that learners need in order to move forward on their educational journey and succeed.

Action Areas

Build an Effective Curriculum	page 116
Ensure Quality Instruction	page 132
Focus on Assessment	page 142
Help Learners Move On	page 148

Build an Effective Curriculum

Outcomes

Action Items

- Put outcomes at the centre of your program.
- Limit the number of outcomes.
- Develop outcomes based on what learners need in order to enter the next level.
- Monitor outcomes to ensure that they remain effective in helping learners develop the necessary skills for their own academic and career goals.

Outcomes at the centre

We are currently witnessing an educational shift towards outcome based and performance based assessment measures. Literacy programs are not immune to this shift, nor should they be. Outcomes provide a program with structure and balance and help learners to see not only what is expected by the program, but also what they can achieve during their studies. Outcomes also bring accountability. Instructors become accountable to learners and program administrators for delivering a course based on program specific outcomes. The program becomes accountable to all interested parties

for ensuring it remains true to the framework of the outcomes. Through this approach, learners, instructors, funders and others can all be clear on the nature of what is being taught along with what the ultimate goals of the program are.

Create reading and writing outcomes that describe the core reading and writing tasks learners must accomplish at their particular level. Use learning strategy outcomes to identify key elements of successful reading, writing, language-learning, and test-taking, and to help learners break down these processes in order to facilitate more effective learning both inside and outside the classroom. Create essential skills outcomes to focus on the necessary skills learners need to develop in order to successfully participate in real-world academic and workplace situations. Essential skills may include numeracy outcomes and college readiness outcomes as well, or these may be separate groups of outcomes themselves.

Numeracy skills and vocabulary development are two other important elements to integrate into the reading, writing, strategy, and essential skills outcomes. Many literacy learners are in need of some level of numeracy instruction, and this can be incorporated into the curriculum either through a specific period of time set aside each day/week during regular classes, or the provision of a dedicated math class. Vocabulary development is also a key element of instruction for this group of learners. A focus on vocabulary should be an integral part of the curriculum with learners regularly exposed to a wide range of relevant vocabulary. ESL literacy learners are in considerable need of deliberate vocabulary building in order to improve both their language and literacy skills.

Learner outcomes should be challenging but achievable. Reading, writing, strategy, and essential skills outcomes should be directly and explicitly in focus at all times for both learners and instructors. Every task instructors set for learners should have at least one learning outcome and learners should be consciously working towards achieving one or more outcome. Through the structure of the outcomes, learners can work towards practical, relevant goals in the classroom in ways that encourage them to not only improve their literacy and learning skills but also to transfer these skills to their lives outside the classroom.



See the Tool Box at the end of this chapter for:

- Outcome Tracking Sheets

Number of outcomes

In the Bridge Program, our outcomes highlight what we consider to be key proficiencies in reading, writing, learning strategies, and essential skills. However, choosing these program outcomes has been an evolving process. For example, in the first two years of our program, we found that the number of reading and writing outcomes chosen was too high: fourteen at the Advanced level and eleven at the Intermediate level. Instructors found it difficult to incorporate this number of outcomes effectively into the curriculum and were concerned that learners were not getting sufficient time to practice each outcome. Consequently, we reviewed the reading and writing outcomes and reduced them by approximately fifty per cent. In order to do this, we used feedback from instructors and learners, and consulted the department within the college into which many of our learners transition. Following this process, we created a new set of reading and writing outcomes. These new outcomes still incorporate the key reading and writing tasks necessary for learners to master in order to transition successfully into post-literacy programming or other training programs, but the number of outcomes is more manageable for instructors to incorporate and learners to accomplish.

Developing outcomes

Developing program outcomes is a vital element of establishing the curriculum. The outcomes that are chosen shape the program, giving it structure, balance and identity. Through the outcomes, learners are provided with a clear vision of what the program expects them to achieve, while highlighting the specific reading and writing tasks they will be engaged in. The outcomes also provide instructors with guidelines for their teaching, as well as making them accountable to the program for delivering a course based on program specific outcomes.

Since program outcomes are clearly fundamental to the program as a whole, choosing the outcomes must be done carefully so that they provide learners with the skills they need for success at their next level of study. It is also important to ensure that your chosen outcomes accurately reflect your program's academic expectations.

The outcome based nature of the Bridge Program allows us to provide a structured, well-balanced, accountable learning environment that many other programs, particularly literacy programs, lack. We have developed our outcome checklists and assessment rubrics for the program from the Canadian Language Benchmarks 2000: ESL for Literacy Learners, the Alberta Learning Senior High English as a Second Language Curriculum, and the Alberta Framework of Essential Competencies for Working, Learning and Living.

Monitor outcomes

It is essential that program outcomes are regularly monitored to ensure they remain relevant to learners as they work towards entry into their next level of study. Monitoring will often lead to an evolution in program outcomes. Outcomes are at the core of your program, are fundamental in shaping it, and must always be the ones that best serve learners as individuals and the program as a whole. Monitoring your outcomes, and taking the necessary action to change or adapt them whenever necessary, will help your program to provide learners with the optimum learning experience.

Thematic Units

Action Items

- Choose high-interest, age-appropriate themes, content, and resources.
- Adapt, modify and create suitable texts and resources for thematic units.
- Recycle outcomes throughout the year in different thematic units.
- Integrate grammar and vocabulary instruction within the context of the thematic unit.
- Build a two-year cycle of thematic units to allow for a 2-year timeline for learners to progress through the program.

Themes, content, and resources

Young adult learners respond to practical and relevant learning experiences. Thematic units provide outcome-based contexts for learning using real-world, high-interest, age-appropriate content. Thematic units focus on teaching language through content. It is important to note, however, that the emphasis is on the language, not on the content. Thematic units for literacy learners do not focus on teaching and testing

content. They focus on helping learners to achieve specific reading, writing, and learning strategy outcomes through a variety of authentic learning tasks.

Thematic units give learners the opportunity to gain insights on high-interest topics while improving their literacy skills. In the Bridge Program, each thematic unit contains three stages: Introduction, Development, and Final Product. Moving through these stages allows learners to gradually build on their knowledge and incorporate what they have already learned into work of more depth and detail, all within the same context.

Thematic units are a means to not only engage learners in meaningful study, but also a way to broaden learners' minds and develop their thinking skills. In the Bridge Program, we use thematic units to move learners from concrete to abstract thought, and gradually extend learners' personal experiences into exploring the personal experiences and perspectives of others. We guide learners to progressively think, discuss and write about unit topics in a broader and deeper sense. Used in this way, thematic units offer learners an opportunity to gain new perspectives and insights on important topics while improving their literacy skills through learning tasks that are interesting, relevant, and focused on explicit outcomes.

In the Bridge Program, we are always conscious that we are not just teaching literacy, but second language literacy. For most learners, the literacy level at which they are being taught is higher, at times considerably higher, than that of their first language. Consequently, learners need to be supported throughout their study and allowances made for the struggle that many of them will endure. Learners can be helped to cope with this struggle by being given an environment to learn where they feel motivated to do so. It is also immensely helpful if it is made clear to learners that what they are learning is not only relevant to them personally, but is helping them to achieve their goals, and is useful outside the classroom as well as inside. Thematic units provide this forum for successful study by ensuring learners receive balanced, supported instruction which incorporates the achievement of reading, writing, and strategy outcomes within an interesting and relevant context.



See the Tool Box at the end of this chapter for:

- A Common Structure for Thematic Units

Suitable texts and resources for thematic units

In the Bridge Program, we have created our own thematic units that focus on achieving reading, writing, and strategy outcomes within broad topics of study, such as health, employment, and the environment. The unit topics we have chosen are both relevant and interesting to learners and have a wide range of appeal. Our thematic units have also evolved over time. We have added new units, and modified previous ones to accommodate our learners' needs and interests. Thematic units are easy to add to, extend, and modify.



See the Tool Box at the end of this chapter for:

- Sample Thematic Unit
- Unit Planning Sheet

Recycle outcomes

Thematic units present an ideal forum for recycling outcomes. Within the broad topics studied via the various thematic units, learners can practice reading, writing, and strategy outcomes many times over, without the feeling of repetition. Learners need the opportunity to recycle what they have learned if they are to retain that knowledge and skill. They also need to be given learning tasks that are relevant and useful to them both inside and outside the classroom. Through recycling outcomes within thematic units, both of these important areas can be covered.

Grammar and vocabulary in context

Communicative language teaching suggests that nothing should be taught in isolation. Thematic units should integrate language skills while teaching reading, writing, and learning strategy outcomes. All tasks should relate directly to an outcome and should be based on the premise that we teach real-life skills for real-life communication. Thematic unit study is not grammar-driven nor is it text-book driven. However, when

relevant and appropriate, direct grammar instruction should be integrated into the context of the thematic unit. Teaching grammar in context helps learners, particularly literacy learners, integrate the grammar into their daily language use. In addition, recycling the grammar concepts across different thematic contexts helps learners transfer their knowledge and skills from one context to another. In the same way, direct vocabulary instruction should be integrated into the thematic units. Continual recycling of vocabulary is critical to help learners integrate the new vocabulary into their daily language use.



See the Tool Box at the end of this chapter for:

- Grammar Scope and Sequence

Two-year cycle of thematic units

Build a two-year cycle of thematic units to ensure that no learner studies the same thematic unit, at the same level, more than once. This cycle also ensures there is a wide range of thematic units available to choose from. Be thoughtful about the order of thematic units and how they progress throughout the year, since there may be times when it is more appropriate to study one theme rather than another. For example, a thematic unit on the environment would be well placed in the academic year to coincide with International Earth Day. Paying attention to these kinds of details allows thematic units to be more relevant and timely and encourages student learning to be connected to their outside world. Once the order of units within your cycle has been decided, however, it does not need to remain fixed, but can be altered as and when you see necessary.

Strategies

Action Items

- Integrate strategies into the curriculum.
- Focus on regular and explicit strategy instruction.
- Choose a variety of basic reading, writing, learning, and test-taking strategies that will be of most use to learners.

Integrate strategies

Teaching students to use strategies helps them become more effective language users and learners. Learning strategies help learners become more successful in reading, writing, language learning, and test-taking. They also help learners to become more effective language users and learners both inside and outside the classroom, and help them prepare for the demands of post-literacy study.

Many learners, especially literacy learners, need help to break down the processes of reading, writing, learning language, and taking tests. Teaching learners to use specific strategies helps them become more successful in each of these areas. A constant and explicit focus on teaching these strategies can help learners become more effective language users and learners both inside and outside the classroom. Strategies can help learners transfer what they know and understand from one familiar situation, the classroom, to other less familiar situations they encounter.

Explicit strategy instruction

Strategy instruction should be integrated every day in the classroom, and at every level of instruction.

Strategies should be:

- taught directly
- used explicitly
- recognised persistently
- assessed regularly

Explicit instruction of a variety of strategies introduces new strategies for some learners and reinforces what others are already doing. Instructors and learners can use think-aloud techniques or other methods to make explicit what is normally an implicit learning act. This helps learners notice strategies in action and recognize opportunities to use strategies. Instructors should be vigilant about recognizing when learners seem to be using a strategy, or when an ideal opportunity to use a strategy arises. Instructors can regularly ask learners to reflect, recognize, and discuss the kinds of strategies they are using, as they are using them. While instructor assessment of learners' strategy use can be challenging, learners can use self-assessment tools to help them recognize their use of strategies and focus on using more and different strategies.

In the Bridge Program, we have developed a model of strategy instruction that helps us teach learners the value of incorporating strategy use into their studies.



See the Tool Box at the end of this chapter for:

- A Model of Strategy Instruction

In the Bridge Program, strategies are assessed through both assessment and reflection. For assessment, learner self-assessment checklists and instructor-assessment checklists are used. For reflection, learner reflection worksheets are used that allow learners to reflect on their use of strategies and set goals for using strategies in their daily work. Both strategy assessment tools are used as part of the continuous

process of recognizing, encouraging, identifying, practicing, and valuing the use of strategies in the classroom.

Teach a variety of strategies

It is necessary that strategies are incorporated into every task learners undertake in order for them to reap the full benefits of strategy use. To achieve this, a variety of strategies must be taught. There are a multitude of strategies to choose from and so it is important that programs make a judicial choice when choosing strategies on which to focus. The key is to choose a wide enough range of strategies to ensure they cover every task learners are expected to complete, while ensuring the list is not so long that instructors cannot realistically teach every strategy included on it.



See the Tool Box at the end of this chapter for:

- Outcome Tracking Sheets

Essential Skills

Action Items

- Integrate essential skills into the curriculum.
- Choose a few broad skills to focus on.
- Break skills down into measurable and teachable outcomes.
- Use project-based learning to teach essential skills.

Integrate essential skills

Today's workplace and post-secondary learning environments are focusing more and more on essential skills, the skills people need for work, learning, and life.

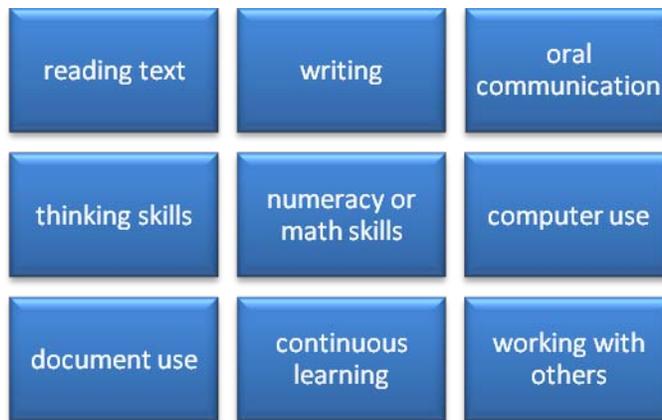
According to Human Resources and Skills Development Canada's webpage, essential skills "provide the foundation for learning all other skills and enable people to evolve with their jobs and adapt to workplace change."

(http://srv108.services.gc.ca/english/general/home_e.shtml)

The Canadian government, working with other agencies, has researched and identified nine essential skills that are "used in nearly every occupation and throughout daily life in different ways and at different levels of complexity."

(http://srv108.services.gc.ca/english/general/Understanding_ES_e.shtml)

The nine essential skills include:



These are the foundational skills that people need to help themselves learn, work, and manage change in their lives. No one needs these skills more than low literacy immigrant youth who face many years ahead of work, learning, and adaptation to change in the workplace. Already at a disadvantage in so many ways, low literacy immigrant youth desperately need to learn these essential skills so that they can manage the challenges ahead.

In the Bridge Program, we teach essentials skills through a project-based learning approach. (See more information on project-based learning below.) The essential skills component has been a vital addition to our program. We have demonstrated that learning essential skills is not only possible but highly valuable for this target group. Former students have returned to our program to recount how important the essential skills projects were, even going as far as saying that they were the most useful and directly applicable learning activities for them.

Our research and experience both confirm that essential skills can and should be integrated into programs at the literacy level.

Focus on broad skills

As the list of the essential skills above demonstrates, the concept of essential skills encompasses a vast range of skill areas, all of which have their own multiple levels of difficulty. Integrating essential skills into a curriculum, therefore, can be challenging. There is a risk of getting overwhelmed by both the breadth and depth of essential skills.

When the Bridge Program began to integrate essential skills into the curriculum, we recognized that all nine essential skills are important for learners. However, since reading, writing, and document use skills are taught and tested through thematic units, and numeracy is handled through a specific math course, we decided to adapt the remaining essential skills into three broad skill areas for our essential skills class to focus on, namely:

- Managing Yourself
- Working with Others
- Working with Computers

The Bridge Program chose these three broad essential skills because they were not specifically being addressed in other areas of the program and because we felt that they were teachable, measurable, and important essential skills to help our learners succeed in their post-secondary educational journey. We have found that narrowing down the number of broad skill areas helps make essential skills instruction more manageable. Initially, the Bridge Program tried to teach and test a larger number of broad essential skill areas than the three listed above. However, we found that since learners need direct instruction and lots of opportunity to practice and demonstrate their essential skills, we need to focus on the most important broad skill areas. So upon reflection, we decided to focus on fewer skill areas and allow students more time to learn, practice, demonstrate, and evaluate their essential skills.

Measurable and teachable outcomes

As mentioned above, essential skills encompass broad skill areas. In order to make these broad skill areas manageable to teach and measure or observe, the skill areas should be broken down into specific outcomes that describe actions that can be demonstrated rather than attitudes that cannot be measured.

For example, to work well with others, learners need to have an attitude of respect for others and willingness to work as a team. While it is difficult to measure whether someone actually respects others, that person's actions and behaviours show evidence of an attitude of respect. So rather than trying to measure an attitude of respect, programs should try to measure the concrete evidence of that respect reflected in specific learner behaviours, such as the ability to listen to others.

In the Bridge Program, within each of the three broad essential skill areas of managing yourself, working with others, and working with computers, there are several specific essential skills outcomes designed to be teachable and measurable or observable. These specific outcomes have been carefully crafted and honed over the years to include observable behaviours rather than unobservable attitudes or intents.



See the Tool Box at the end of this chapter for:

- Outcome Tracking Sheets

Project-based learning

Essential skills can be incorporated into a program through a project-based learning component, which helps learners develop the skills necessary for successful participation in North American workplace and academic contexts. Project-based learning allows a wide variety of essential skills to be learned, practiced, and demonstrated as learners engage in long-term, interdisciplinary projects and create meaningful artefacts of their learning for real audiences. Through their involvement in the projects, learners hone many of the skills necessary for successful participation in future academic and workplace opportunities. Instructors should focus learners on the

connections between what they are doing in the essential skills/project-based learning classroom and the real world.

In the Bridge Program, we created special classes called BELLS (Building Essential Life and Literacy Skills) and FIT (Futures In Training) to specifically address essential skills at various levels. In BELLS, learners with higher literacy and language skills focus on building their essential skills through ongoing cooperative learning projects. In these projects, learners are taught direct life and literacy skills and strategies that will assist them in coping with their real-world academic, workplace and everyday life experiences. In FIT, learners with lower literacy and language skills focus on building their essential skills through a modified approach to cooperative learning projects.

The format of the essential skills classes in the Bridge Program allows learners at all levels to work alone and in small groups as individual needs and projects allow. Projects encourage active citizenship, creative planning, and responsible management, and learners are permitted a degree of control and choice over their learning. This control and choice is something new and exciting to many learners. However, instructors must remain judicious to ensure that the level of learners' control matches the level of learners' development.

During each essential skills project in either FIT or BELLS, learners are made explicitly aware of which broad skill area and specific outcomes they are working on, and how these skills relate to both the project and life in the "real world". There is regular instructor assessment of and feedback on learners' participation in the project and demonstration of the essential skills in focus. In addition, learners are involved in regular group/peer assessment, self-assessment, and self-reflection. All these forms of assessment are used to help learners' recognize the skills they are demonstrating, to celebrate areas of success, and to focus on improving areas of weakness.



See the Tool Box at the end of this chapter for:

- Sample Essential Skills Project Plan

Ensure Quality Instruction

Instruction

Action Items

- Use direct instruction in the classroom.
- Keep outcomes in focus at all times for both learners and instructors.
- Make explicit connections for learners.
- Use integrated skills instruction: do not teach skills in isolation
- Use content as a vehicle for language and literacy development.
- Keep learners engaged and motivated.
- Recycle language, skills, and outcomes within and across thematic units.

NOTE: This part of the framework offers information about instruction in transition programs. It is not meant to be a teaching methods text. Rather, it is meant to inform programs about some of the best practices for instructing young adult literacy learners so that transition programs are better equipped to build their program structures in ways that support that kind of instruction.

Direct instruction

Learners in transition programs need instruction that is direct and explicit. They already have so much going on all at once – language learning, literacy learning, college readiness development, self-esteem and identity issues, fear of failure, previous negative learning experience – that it is too much to expect them to tease out the rules, structures, and concepts from their learning experiences and assimilate them implicitly and independently. Rather, instruction should be direct and explicit, helping learners understand exactly what is being learned, why, and how it can help them.

Like the learners in the Bridge Program, transition program learners are keen to move as quickly as possible so that they can transition on to what comes next. Consequently, they do not have time to waste in the classroom. Programs that are sensitive to both the situation and the needs of this group of learners ensure that instruction in the program never consists of busy work or tasks done for no reason. Instruction in transition programs, therefore, should be direct, intentional, explicit, and focused on skill development and outcome mastery.

Outcomes in focus

The program outcomes should remain in focus at all times to both instructors and learners, and the relationship between any learning task and the outcome to which it relates should be evident.

The Bridge Program is outcome-based and outcome-driven, and as such all learning tasks undertaken relate to the achievement of at least one reading, writing, learning strategy or essential skill outcome. It is an important role of Bridge instructors to ensure learners remain engaged in lessons and focused on outcomes, and they

achieve this by addressing learner interests through carefully chosen content and an enthusiastic, caring approach in the classroom.

Make explicit connections

It is often necessary to make explicit connections for learners in order for them to realize the relevance and importance of what they are being asked to do, and this is a key responsibility of instructors.

In the Bridge Program, instructors create responsive classrooms that are learner-centred, where learners interact with each other, the instructor, and the materials being used. Instructors create a secure but challenging learning environment where learners' experience and knowledge are valued openly and where explicit connections to learners' lives outside the classroom are made frequently.

Integrated skills instruction

Follow the communicative language teaching approach that recommends nothing is taught in isolation. Instruction should use an integrated skills approach that incorporates language and literacy skills while focusing on the achievement of one or more of the program outcomes. The use of thematic units and group projects can help achieve this goal.

Content as a vehicle

The content of any lesson should always be the vehicle for language and literacy development, rather than what actually drives the lesson. The content remains, however, a vital component. Learners must be engaged if they are to succeed, so the content should capture their attention and imaginations. This can only be achieved if the content presented is age-appropriate, relevant, and interesting, and therefore its choice must be a judicious one.

Learner engagement and motivation

Make the goals of a lesson clearly understood and ensure learners are aware of what the expectations of the lesson are. If learners are taught with clear intention and focus, and they are given “real-world” tasks to complete for a “real” reason, then engagement, motivation, and success are likely to follow.

Also, encourage learners to be independent, to have opinions, and to take on roles of responsibility within the classroom. Learners show increased perseverance and willingness when they are actively involved with their own learning and the decisions related to that learning. Help learners feel confident enough to take the risks necessary for their language and literacy learning as well as their personal development.

Recycle language, skills, and outcomes

Ultimately, if learners are to fully benefit from what they have been taught, through the retention of the skills learned in the classroom and the ability to transfer these skills to their outside lives, they must be given the opportunity to recycle the language and skills they have developed and the outcomes they have worked upon. This should be done in ways that ensure learners never become bored with their work but instead familiar and confident of their language and literacy skills within a variety of topics. Instructors must ensure both content and outcomes are presented in a variety of ways that stimulate learners’ imaginations and challenge them appropriately.

Build an Effective Instructional Team

Action Items

- Think holistically when developing a staff team
- Recruit a qualified, well-balanced, flexible team.
- Create job descriptions for team positions.
- Ensure team members support both the social and academic needs of learners.
- Recognize the substantial commitment required from the team.
- Foster a team environment.
- Offer professional development opportunities for team.

Developing and recruiting the team

While learners are the heart of the work in education, it is the instructional team who are the hands, the skilled and reflective practitioners who facilitate and guide learners along the path to success. There is much that programs can do to ensure learners are provided with the optimal learning environment by building an effective instructional team.

Successful programs are committed to providing excellent instruction, the necessary learner support, and a superior work environment for their instructional team. In order to facilitate this, hire highly-qualified instructors and educational assistants who have appropriate academic qualifications along with proven skills in the classroom. In addition, ensure the support staff, such as student advisors and student support workers, also has the necessary skills and experience to work constructively with this particular demographic of learner. Look holistically at potential team members and ensure they bring with them the skills necessary to work in a caring and productive manner with your target audience. Working with groups of adolescent literacy learners can be challenging at times, and instructors, support workers, and the instructional team as a whole have to be prepared to meet these challenges. All those involved with the program must be willing to see learners as individuals with diverse needs and give the support necessary to make learners feel secure and welcome at all times.

Job descriptions

It is essential that everyone on the program team appreciates not only their role within the program, but also what the program expects from them. To facilitate this, create detailed job descriptions for all positions within the team. These job descriptions will help give staff direction and confidence in their individual roles. Your program will expect much from instructors, educational assistants, and support workers, and it is therefore necessary that they clearly understand what their personal responsibilities are and how far these responsibilities extend.

Supporting the needs of learners

In the Bridge Program, instructors engage learners in dialogue; encourage learners to express their opinions and reflect on their learning; and conduct classes in an environment which is secure, supportive, and learner-centred. Instructors, support workers, and the program coordinator take a caring, positive approach in addressing learners' needs. The instructional team as a whole ensures learners are always aware

that all those involved in the program are there to provide whatever help, support and advice they can to ensure learners succeed in reaching their goals.

Commitment and the team environment

Any team working with adolescent literacy learners must be aware that they are expected to support both the social and academic needs of learners. At times, this may involve a degree of crisis management by not only support workers, but instructors and the program coordinator, as learners often come forward with a problem only when it has reached the crisis point. Since the program requires a substantial commitment by all those involved, the program must support the whole team in their individual roles and give them the tools and training necessary to function effectively and comfortably. The support shared within the instructional team is important and helps everyone feel connected. Offer frequent, focused, communicative team-meetings to help facilitate a supportive team environment.

Instructors in the Bridge Program act as facilitators rather than lecturers, guiding learners on their individual journeys and helping them to move forward. Instructors are part of a dynamic, flexible, caring team of individuals whose focus is always on learner engagement, motivation, and success. Those working in support roles, such as student advisors and student support workers, are also vital members of the team. They work closely with instructors and the program coordinator to ensure learners are always given the necessary support and that issues facing learners are dealt with as quickly and effectively as possible. The close relationship between instructors, support workers and the program coordinator is a key element in the provision of the type of instructional environment in which this particular group of learners can flourish.

Professional development

To maintain a superior work environment, there must be regular, relevant, and focused professional development. This professional development should assist team members in better understanding literacy demands on adolescent learners and how best to support those demands. As appropriate, team members should be encouraged

to attend conferences and workshops that offer a forum to learn more about the role, importance, and development of literacy instruction and related learner support in today's society. Everyone should also be given opportunities to discuss their roles as literacy instructors and support workers and the related challenges, and be offered the chance to network with others working in similar fields. Online workshops or forums for professional development and collaboration are plentiful, and can offer opportunities to programs that are more geographically isolated.

It is also important that the team be given exposure to the current research being undertaken in literacy instruction and programming, to allow them to gain a deeper understanding of this often complex field and to help them develop their own ideas. This exposure may be in the form of conference attendance but can also be attained through workshop sessions. A selection of current articles and/or books related to literacy instruction and programming can be reviewed and discussed, and team members can be given the opportunity to present their own ideas on various topics.

There are other professional development opportunities available through program level workshops. Workshops on core program-related topics, such as portfolio assessment or strategy teaching, should be offered on a regular basis. Everyone in the instructional team should be given the opportunity to suggest workshop topics and take active roles in facilitating workshops as appropriate. Often individual staff members require further support in a particular area and a program workshop can be the ideal opportunity and forum within which to offer this support.

Instructional Environment

Action Items

- Structure the program so learners are taught in small groups.
- Organize classes into homogeneous language and literacy skill levels.
- Make learning outcomes explicit at all times.
- Recognize that these learners demand more attention, support, and classroom management than other learners.
- Have team meetings to help keep all team members connected and informed.

Small group instruction and homogeneous levels

Arrange classes in small groups, with a maximum of around twelve learners per group. Within these groups the levels of learners' abilities should be as homogeneous as possible. This structure provides the optimum learning environment and allows instructors the opportunity to get to know their learners on an individual basis. It also prevents the literacy program trap of becoming a catch-all class. Learners are placed in classes that recognize their abilities and that focus on instruction at the appropriate level for them.

Explicit outcomes

Ensure the program outcomes remain in focus and explicit at all times, with every task relating in some way to a program outcome. Learners should always have a real reason for doing a learning task and their time should never be wasted.

Recognize level of support needed

Learners who need a literacy transition program often require more support than other language learners. Instructors should be aware of this and be willing to demonstrate their commitment to both the learners and the program. Instructors should be available to learners and be prepared to offer advice and/or guidance whenever necessary, as well as supporting the student advisor in his or her role as appropriate.

Through the close, trusting relationship created between learners and instructors, a feeling of community is built in the classroom. Within this community, instructors are trained to be responsive to the needs of individual learners and to recognize situations when learners' may need help, even if learners have not directly asked for help. When appropriate, the instructional team should connect learners to the many resources offered by the program, particularly the student advisor or student support worker who can assist learners individually and refer them to other providers as necessary.

In the Bridge Program, we have found that learners respond positively to both the academic and social support they receive from the entire program team. The real and evident support given to learners is an important component in this type of program since many learners have little or no such support outside the school environment.

Team meetings

Regular team meetings should be arranged to help keep all those involved with the program connected and informed of issues relating to the learners in the program. The team meetings can provide an ideal forum for discussion of any relevant program-related matters or individual instructor concerns.

Focus on Assessment

Action Items

- Commit to regular ongoing assessment in class.
- Create rigorous assessments such as screening tests, pre-tests, mid-term tests, and post-tests.
- Create an overview of the year to indicate when and how to test learners.
- Use grade equivalency or other standardized measures as part of the program assessment.
- Create marking rubrics that identify what is being assessed.
- Teach learner self-evaluation.
- Use portfolios to demonstrate learner progress.
- Have regular meetings with learners at transition points to communicate progress on outcomes.
- Use assessment to guide and improve instruction.

Regular ongoing assessment

Assessment is an essential part of program planning and delivery. The word assessment means different things to different people. For the purposes of this framework, assessment is the continuous gathering of useful information on a daily and term basis that helps programs to:

- better understand learners and their needs
- report learner progress
- guide and improve instruction
- improve overall learning in the classroom

Learners should be assessed regularly. In fact, assessment should not only be considered an on-going process, all learning tasks should involve some type of assessment, either formal or informal.

Formal assessments are one of three types:

- Program level assessments, such as screening tests, pre-tests, and post-tests
- Instructor assessments, such as unit tests, grade equivalency readings, and mid-term tests
- Learner self-assessments, such as a self-reflection on strategy use and portfolio development

Results of formal assessments should be recorded and used as evidence of learner progress as well as to identify learner needs. Records should also be kept of learners' progress towards achieving the program reading and writing outcomes for their particular level.

Informal assessments are often used by instructors during lessons to establish whether learners are following the lesson and if they are challenged enough. As such, informal assessment can be a useful tool to help instructors respond to learners' needs and plan further instruction.

Rigorous assessments

It is important to teach what you test and to test what you teach. This way, there are no surprises for learners. Assessment should be linked directly to instruction and the assessment process transparent for learners.

In any assessment situation, always make clear to learners exactly what is being assessed, how it will be assessed and the reason for the assessment. It is important that this process is completed before any assessment takes place. In addition, adequate time should be given before any assessment to enable learners to review their work and prepare for the assessment. Once an assessment has been completed, instructors should communicate the assessment results to learners in a way that helps them understand their results. Learners should also be given the opportunity to discuss any questions or concerns they may have.

Overview of the year

It is helpful to create a visual overview of the transition program's academic year. This overview is highly valuable in many ways, not least in highlighting when and how assessments will take place. With a clear overview, instructors and learners alike can be sure of what is expected of them at any particular time of the year. See the Tool Box for a sample overview of a program year.



See the Tool Box at the end of this chapter for:

- Overview of the Bridge Program

Standardized measures as part of the program assessment

To ensure reliable, efficient assessment procedures are maintained, standardized measures, such as grade equivalency tests, should be used as part of program level assessments. This type of assessment gives an indication of learners' abilities within a widely accepted marking structure. It is also important because as learners' progress and transition from your program, they will be increasingly exposed to standardized assessments. If learners are to be properly prepared for future

assessments, it is vital they begin to experience standardized measures as soon as possible. This is not to say that standardized measures should become the only form of assessment used in your program, but they should be fully incorporated into the program assessment regimen along with other formal and informal assessments.

Marking rubrics

It is always important in assessment to be clear about what is being assessed. Creating marking rubrics and templates is one excellent way to help instructors assess what is meant to be assessed. Rubrics ensure a degree of uniformity during assessment, provide a framework within which marking is carried out, and can help facilitate instructor consultation with learners. Instructors should consult with each other and work together to ensure inter-rater reliability in the use of the rubrics.



See the Tool Box at the end of this chapter for:

- Sample Assessment Rubric

Learner self-evaluation

The Bridge Program works within an instructional environment in which learners are active participants in assessment, rather than passive recipients. Learners engage regularly in self-evaluation and reflection. These processes help learners to understand program and instructor expectations, to strive for improvement, and to recognize their progress and success. We have found that formal self-assessment and self-reflection is often a new concept and a new process for learners. Initially, they need instruction and guidance in the process itself. However, once they are familiar with the process, self-reflection is a valuable tool for learners to use to express themselves and to help them identify their own successes and challenges. It also helps provide them with a reference point so they can understand where they are at in their learning journey. This can help learners set realistic goals for themselves.



See the Tool Box at the end of this chapter for:

- Sample Self-Assessments of Strategy Use
- Sample Self-Assessments of Essential Skills

Learner portfolios

Portfolios are tools to help instructors be diligent in assessing, tracking, and reflecting on learners' growth over the course of each semester. The use of portfolios also encourages learner reflection and self-assessment and facilitates the important ongoing learner assessment by instructors. Use working portfolios and showcase portfolios as a means of establishing systematic evidence of student learning and progress. Working portfolios contain selected pieces from class work and required set pieces that reflect the program outcomes. They allow learners and instructors to monitor improvements in writing and reflect on both the process and product. Showcase portfolios contain learners' best work and self-reflections. The showcase portfolio stays with learners as they move on from the program. It serves as a record of learners' growth and strengths.

Working portfolios and showcase portfolios are used in the Bridge Program to not only monitor learners' progress and facilitate ongoing assessment, but also as reference points during the three-way conferences held at the key transition points mentioned above. At this time, learners participate in a conference with their instructor and student advisor, and the portfolios are used to aid in the discussions of learner goals and progress. Learners also use their portfolios during discussions with other college staff, such as counselors and support workers. Using portfolios this way helps learners negotiate and manage their own educational development. In addition, it allows them to demonstrate their ability to navigate the educational system, a new experience for the majority of our learners.

We also teach learners the purpose of the portfolios. Through a greater understanding of why they are using portfolios, learners are inspired to make the best possible use of their portfolios. They are also both encouraged and expected to share their portfolios at meetings and special events, such as program open houses. In the Bridge Program, we have found that portfolios are an excellent way for learners to demonstrate progress within the program, show commitment to their studies, and build the confidence necessary to take control of their own learning.



See the Tool Box at the end of this chapter for:

- Sample Portfolio Requirements
- Learner Self-Reflection on Portfolio Contents

Learner meetings at transition points

Learner meetings are an excellent method of keeping learners informed and of celebrating their successes. While learners should receive constant feedback about their individual progress, transition programs should also schedule regular formal meetings with learners at transition points. These meetings will help to ensure learners receive documented evidence of their progress toward their goals and toward program outcomes. These regular consultations with learners are especially important at key transition points of the program, such as the middle and end points of the year, when it is necessary for learners to make decisions about their next steps. The information they receive in transition point meetings helps learners understand what they have achieved, which areas of their work still require improvement, and how this impact their short term and long term goals. (For more information, read about 3-way meetings in Build In Academic Support which can be found in the Support and Retain Learners stage.)

Assessment informs instruction

Instructors should create learning tasks that challenge learners to perform the program outcomes within relevant, meaningful contexts, and all learning tasks should involve some assessment, either informal or formal. Ongoing formal and informal assessment should drive instruction and inform both learners and instructors on learners' strengths, weaknesses, and progress over time. Using assessment in this way can help programs keep their instruction intentional, focused on outcomes, and tailored to learner needs.

Help Learners Move On

Everything done in a transition program is with the intention of helping learners move on, and this is the stage in the program that you and your learners have been persistently working towards. Now there are just a few more steps to take in order to ensure learners are fully prepared for what lies ahead of them.

Action Items

- Make the transition process transparent to all stakeholders.
- Establish transition times during the program that coincide with unit or semester breaks.
- Develop an orientation session and information package for new learners to the program.
- Offer opportunities for potential learners to visit the program and develop rapport before transitioning in.
- Offer opportunities for current learners to visit their future programs.
- Offer information sessions for current learners nearing the end of their program time.
- Help learners understand funding requirements and application processes for their future programs.
- Develop an alumni group.

Transparent process

Transitioning will only be successful and smooth if the process is clear, concise, and organised. The landscape of the journey learners have to make must be explained to them (and all stakeholders) in such a way as to ensure they understand but are not overwhelmed by what lies ahead. To help make this process transparent for everyone, use the pathway maps that you developed in the Identify and Recruit stage of this framework. These maps can help stakeholders visualize the transitioning journey. Also, remember that a supportive environment which encourages planning and goal setting allows learners to move forward with confidence, to take control of their lives and to reach their goals.

Ensure learners are given the appropriate advice to help them navigate their way through the education process and to achieve their goals. The student advisor should play a major role in this process, supporting and guiding learners as they plan the steps they need to take to achieve both short term and long term goals. The student advisor can also help learners make the transition from a high school learning environment to one in which learners are expected to become independent and proactive in decisions relating to their education in particular and their lives in general.

Programs must ensure that the right advice is given to learners, at the appropriate time, and in a format which is clear, concise and understandable. This will help to de-mystify the education process and allow learners to explore the best way forward for them in relation to their long term goals.

In order to help learners transition, it is essential to know your audience and to know your program. Learners must be involved at every stage of the transition process. In order for them to remain involved they must understand what is being discussed or planned, and also what is expected of them. To ensure this, the materials used for goal setting, class visits, etc. must be adapted as necessary to ensure learners are able to use them appropriately. In addition, a sensitive and caring approach is important when meeting with learners. Often conversations about the many stages learners have to

complete before reaching their goal can be difficult, and the initial frustration and disappointment many learners feel must be handled appropriately.

Transition times

Transition times are pre-determined points in the academic year at which new learners can enter the program and current learners who are ready to take their next steps can exit the program. These times offer learners, instructors, advisors, and support workers the opportunity to have 3-way advising meetings. It is also a time for summative assessment to take place and official reporting of assessment results and learner progress and current levels. If learners are entering or exiting the program, transition times help the program focus on the steps required such as orientation sessions, end of program evaluations, and pre or post testing.

It is important for transition programs to have several transition times throughout the academic year. Allowing learners to enter or exit the program at the beginning or end of the academic year is too restrictive for young adult literacy learners. If new learners have been referred to the program, they should not have to wait for several months before they enter. If they do have to wait, they may get discouraged and the program may lose them altogether. It is also important to remember that current learners in the program who are getting prepared to transition on to their next steps are still at high risk of dropping out due to frustration and other pressures. Therefore, programs should be flexible enough to allow learners to move when they are ready. Having several transition times throughout the year offers programs the structure and the flexibility to best meet learners' needs.

Orientations for new learners

Knowing the barriers that low literacy immigrant youth face, such as a fear of the unknown and a lack of support systems, it is crucial for learners to receive some kind of orientation to their new program. In the Bridge Program, there are orientation sessions for new learners at every transition time. Programs can develop packages of information, specifically written, of course with the low literacy learner in mind,

containing information such as program expectations, class schedules, academic calendars, staff names and contact information, and other pertinent information. Programs can also develop a buddy system or mentor system so that new learners in the program are paired with current learners and can be given a tour or an introduction to the school and program while also developing a personal connection to another learner. In the Bridge Program, we also have initial meetings with new learners during orientation sessions. This helps learners understand the supports that are in place for them in the program and allows the advisors and support workers to begin the process of developing a rapport with learners.

Whatever a new learner orientation looks like in your program, keep the information simple, clear, and well-written for the learners. Remember that the goal of an orientation session is to overcome some of the fears and barriers that learners have upon arrival to the program.

Opportunities for class visits

Class visits are an important strategy to help learners transition into and out of transition programs. Visits can be arranged for individuals or groups of learners who may be considering entering the program and for current program learners who are nearing their transition out of the program.

For incoming learners or potential learners to a transition program, a class visit gives them the opportunity to see what the transition program looks like and feels like, while still offering the safety and security of knowing that they are simply visitors. It offers the chance for potential learners to get to know the program before they enter, thus reducing some of the fear and apprehension they may feel when they first arrive. Often in the Bridge Program, we try to structure class visits for incoming learners to take place during a special event in the essential skills class. These special events are usually open to invited guests and have learners showcasing their work. These events provide an excellent chance for groups of potential learners to visit our current learners and get a sense of what happens in the program.

For current learners who are nearing transition, class visits give learners the opportunity to gain an understanding of what higher level classes involve and the relevant expectations of those programs while in a relaxed and non-threatening setting. During class visits, learners from the Bridge Program sit in on a higher level class, usually in a career program, for example a computer technician program or a health care program. The purpose of these visits is to give learners a taste of higher level classes and the expectations of career programs. They experience the fast pace of the higher level class while in a controlled, non-threatening, exploratory situation. They are not expected to understand everything or to participate in conversations or class discussions, but they may do so if applicable and at the instructors' invitation.

There are important preparations that take place in the Bridge Program before the current learners participate in class visits. With the assistance of instructors in class, learners explore programs that are available within the college and at other institutions as appropriate, and they indicate their top three choices of programs to visit. Although many learners choose programs that they hope to enter in the future, they are instructed to choose a variety of programs that they would be interested in visiting, not necessarily just interested in attending in the future. Since we deal with many different programs and institutions for class visits, we have learners indicate their top three choices so that there is a good chance that at least one of those choices can be arranged.

Once learners have indicated their choices, our program staff contacts the programs and make the necessary arrangements for individual learners or small groups of learners to visit the classes for a short time. Different learners have visits on different days, so our instructors need to be aware of the arrangements in advance and prepared for individual or small group absences. Once the visits have been arranged, learners contact the chosen program's instructor directly via e-mail to introduce themselves, confirm the visit details, and thank the instructor in advance for their cooperation. Then, depending on the location and time of the visit, learners leave Bridge Program classes for part or all of the day of their class visit. If possible, they interview a student from the career program to find out about their goals, their experience in the class, and things like homework and classroom expectations in the career program.

After their visit, learners return to the Bridge Program classes and are expected to make a simple report to the class about their visit and what they learned or experienced. They are also expected to e-mail the career program instructor again to officially thank them for the experience.

Through class visits, our program offers learners the opportunity to get a small taste of what is to come for them. They experience independence and responsibility in an adult context and are challenged to enter unfamiliar territory, but they still feel confident because they receive support and assistance from the Bridge Program. The impact of class visits varies with different learners, but we have found that learners often return from class visits with new insights and a new perspective on their goals.



See the Tool Box at the end of this chapter for:

- Expectations for Class Visits

Help learners with next steps

Another way programs can help learners transition on to the next step is to help them understand and manage the process of applying for their next programs and funding. Information sessions, form-filling workshops, and other special sessions can be held to help learners prepare their forms and questions for when they apply to their next program. The eligibility requirements for funding, the procedures for applying, and the acceptance process for learners are rarely straightforward and easy to understand. Deadlines are usually strict, and inadvertent errors or omissions on forms sometimes can make or break learners' applications. Programs can offer practical, hands-on workshops and teach learners the strategies to help them manage the processes. These efforts will help learners be more independent and successful when dealing with the bureaucracies and processes they are sure to encounter and, therefore, will help ensure a successful and smooth transition for learners.

Learners also need help to understand the cost of education, available funding, and the true value of a post-secondary education. Learners often think of education as free and therefore they need help to understand the cost versus the benefits.

Learners may also need assistance to access any funding that may be available. If funding is available then the program should make sure it is in place. If no funding is available, or learners have additional financial needs, learners should be given the help they need to review any other funding available and to make any necessary appointments. A lack of funding will often make the difference between learners attending school or not, and therefore the program must ensure this aspect is dealt with appropriately. Learners can also be helped to understand that the cost of their education should be seen as an investment in their future, and that the benefits of their education will be reaped later.

Some learners expect post-secondary school to be free, or they assume that they will always be eligible for funding, or that other learners are not struggling financially. We have found it helpful to explain to learners that other Canadians have to pay for their post-high school education and that most of them work and go to school at the same time in order to manage the cost.

Alumni group

Develop an alumni group to help learners maintain their connection to the program and give them the chance to mentor others. The transition process from your program will be a major step for most learners, and a continued link with the program and their former classmates can be a significant form of support as learners progress on their educational journey. An alumni group provides positive role models to new learners and allows them to establish relationships with those who have already experienced success. It also gives the alumni members the opportunity to celebrate their success and share their experiences in a constructive way as they become involved in mentoring others.

Build Relationships

With High Schools and School Boards

- Develop specialized feeder programs and partnerships to begin transition process with learners still registered in high school.
- Maintain good relationships and open lines of communication with high schools and school boards to ensure a seamless transition process for incoming learners.

With Community Resources

- Connect learners with their wider community through activities such as field trips, special events, and volunteer opportunities.
- Invite community members into the program as guest speakers to present on topics related to the curriculum.

Within Your Own Institution

- Communicate with other programs in your institution to help in developing outcomes that prepare learners for their next steps.
- Maintain good relationships and open lines of communication with programs and advisors in your institution to ensure a seamless transition process for learners continuing on to other programs.

With Other Post-Secondary Institutions

- Communicate with programs in other institutions to help in developing outcomes that prepare learners for their next steps.
- Maintain good relationships and open lines of communication with other institutions to ensure a seamless transition process for learners moving on to another institution.

With Governments and Funders

- Communicate success stories to governments and funders to advocate for more funding and support for transition programs.

Tool Box

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Outcome Tracking Sheets

Use tracking sheets like these to help instructors keep outcomes in focus at all times.

Reading & Writing Outcomes

Phase II Level

Directions for Instructors: These are the Reading and Writing Outcomes for the Intermediate class. Use this chart to keep track of which outcomes were covered in which units by placing a checkmark in the columns to the right of the outcome.

Phase II - Unit Outcomes		Unit					
		1	2	3	4	5	6
Reading	1. Read and interpret simple short texts						
	2. Read and record information from a variety of simple functional texts						
	3. Read and respond to simplified short novels						
Writing	1. Write simple short texts						
	2. Write simple notes and letters						
	3. Write and deliver a 1-2 minute presentation						

Phase III Level

Directions for Instructors: These are the Reading and Writing Outcomes for the Advanced class. Use this chart to keep track of which outcomes were covered in which units by placing a checkmark in the columns to the right of the outcome.

Phase III Unit Outcomes		Unit					
		1	2	3	4	5	6
Reading	1. Read and interpret short texts						
	2. Read and record information from a variety of functional texts						
	3. Read and respond to novels						
Writing	1. Write a variety of paragraphs						
	2. Write formal and informal letters						
	3. Write a variety of longer texts						
	4. Research, write and deliver a 2-3 minute presentation						

Outcome Tracking Sheets (Cont'd)

Strategy Outcomes

Phase II and III Levels

Directions for Instructors: These are the Strategy Outcomes for the Bridge Program. Use this chart to keep track of which strategies were covered in which units by placing a checkmark in the columns to the right of the strategy.

Strategy Outcomes		Units					
		1	2	3	4	5	6
Reading Strategies	1. Predicts and checks predictions						
	2. Rereads to increase comprehension						
	3. Scans for information						
	4. Looks for the main idea (and summarizes at adv level)						
	5. Retells a story (in sequence)						
Writing Strategies	1. Thinks and talks about topic before writing						
	2. Plans and/or brainstorms ideas						
	3. Puts ideas in order/organizes writing						
	4. Uses topic sentences						
	5. Edits and revises writing						
Language Learning Strategies	1. Groups/classifies words according to meaning						
	2. Highlights new vocabulary						
	3. Keeps a record of useful vocabulary						
	4. Asks for help and correction						
	5. Guesses meanings of new words from context (adv only)						
Test-Taking Strategies	1. Reviews before the test						
	2. Arrives early and prepared (with pen, pencil, eraser, etc.)						
	3. Looks over whole test before beginning						
	4. Reads instructions carefully						
	5. Checks answers						

Outcome Tracking Sheets (Cont'd)

Essential Skills Outcomes

Phase II and III Levels

Directions: These are the Essential Skills Outcomes. Use this chart to keep track of which outcomes were addressed in which projects by placing a checkmark in the columns to the right of the outcome.

Skill Area	Essential Skills Outcomes	Projects					
		1	2	3	4	5	6
Managing yourself	Manage your time by using a calendar and a project timeline						
	Manage your stuff by keeping all your coursework organized						
	Develop short term and long term goals						
	Perform self-evaluation to know your strengths and challenges						
Working with others	Demonstrate listening skills						
	Demonstrate decision-making skills						
	Demonstrate problem-solving skills						
	Be responsible to your group by getting work done & helping others						
Working with computers	Communicate electronically with others (ex. using Blackboard tools)						
	Use a word processing program (ex. Microsoft Word)						
	Use the Internet to find basic information.						
	Create a simple digital media presentation. (PowerPoint, video, webpage)						

A Common Structure for Thematic Units

A structure like this helps guide thematic unit development.

Outcomes: Reading, writing, and strategy outcomes are the central focus of each unit and dictate the choice of tasks and resources. The outcomes are always directly and explicitly in focus for both learners and instructors.

Tasks: Learning tasks are designed to help learners achieve the specific reading and writing outcomes. Learners receive direct mediation from instructors to understand why they are undertaking the required tasks and how the tasks are helping them to achieve the outcomes as well as their own goals.

Resources: Resources are chosen by individual instructors to support the learning tasks. Resources are often created and/or modified by instructors to make them suitable for the needs of their particular class.

Vocabulary: Learners have gaps in vocabulary which must be addressed. The key vocabulary for each unit is highlighted and taught explicitly so outcomes are achieved and unit topics are understood. Vocabulary is recycled within and across units.

Grammar: Learners have gaps in grammar which must be addressed. The grammar needs of a particular group become the focus of instruction along with whatever grammar is necessary to achieve particular outcomes. Grammar is always taught in context and never as “page by page” of a grammar text.

Learning strategies: Strategies support unit instruction at every level and are included in every learning task. Units focus on particular learning strategy outcomes, ensuring sufficient time for learners to incorporate and recognize strategies in their daily work.

Assessment: Formal and informal assessments drive instruction and inform both learners and instructors on learner progress and needs. Use on-going, formative assessment throughout the unit and summative assessments at the end of each unit. Make assessment explicit and transparent. Be clear about what is being assessed and how. Test what you teach, and teach what you test.

Sample Thematic Unit

This thematic unit plan ensures outcomes are in focus and gives instructors what they need to do their own, in-depth unit and lesson planning.

Unit Theme: Feeling Great! Making the Right Choices

Rationale: This unit introduces learners to the concept of healthy lifestyle choices. Learners begin by brainstorming ways to “feel great” and move on to write about their personal strategies for staying healthy. The unit includes study of food label information and food preparation, and looks at other health related issues such as sleep and dieting. Learners extend the knowledge gained during the unit by writing an article on a specific health-related topic and follow with a longer writing assignment, where they write in broader terms about how to live a healthy life.

Stage 1: Introduction	
<p>Outcomes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Read and interpret short texts (descriptions; articles) - Write a variety of paragraphs (stories; process) 	<p>Suggested Tasks:</p> <p><i>Create word wall of vocabulary – add/refer to it throughout unit</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Poster project: Top Ten Tips for Feeling Great - Read & answer questions from articles on sleep, dieting, etc - Reuse vocabulary to write paragraph for poster - Reuse vocabulary to write paragraph: How I Stay Healthy
Stage 2: Development	
<p>Outcomes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Read and record info from a variety of functional texts - Write a variety of paragraphs (descriptions; articles) 	<p>Suggested Tasks:</p> <p><i>Teach language of food labels, recipes, etc.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Read/compare food label information, recipes, etc. - Write recipes, share, make class recipe book - Reuse vocabulary for article: How to Eat Healthily, for recipe book
Stage 3: Final Product	
<p>Outcomes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Write formal and informal letters - Write a variety of longer texts (essays) - Research, write and deliver a 2-3 minute presentation 	<p>Suggested Tasks:</p> <p><i>Review/practice unit vocabulary & grammar with crosswords, quizzes, etc.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Invitation letters to potential guest speakers <i>Prepare questions for guest speakers</i> - Thank you letters to guest speakers - Refer back to previous work to write essay: How to Feel Great - Reuse vocabulary in presentations of How to Feel Great
<p>Vocabulary Focus:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Daily activities - Interests - Feelings/emotions - Human traits/characteristics - Foods/eating habits - Specific words from flyers, Canada Food Guide, etc. - Time order words 	<p>Suggested Resources:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Grocery store flyers - Magazines/Poster project supplies - Copies of the Canada Food Guide - Pictures of people looking stressed, relaxing, etc. - Pictures of foods/meals - Information on alternative medicine - Blank cue cards/video camera (presentations) - Guest speakers: Nutritionist, Health Care workers

Unit Planning Sheet

Templates like this can help ensure all important elements of thematic units remain in focus during in-depth planning.

This is one of three sheets that mirror the three stages of units. They allow instructors to make an in-depth plan of the learning tasks, resources, and assessments to be used to teach and demonstrate growth in the reading and writing outcomes, the vocabulary, grammar, and learning strategies.

Unit Theme: _____			
Stage 1: Introduction	Tasks	Resources	Strategies
Outcomes			
Vocabulary			
Grammar			
Assessment			
Reading:			
Writing:			
Grammar:			
Vocabulary:			

Grammar Scope and Sequence

Literacy learners often have gaps in grammar and need to be taught grammar in context. A scope and sequence chart identifies possible grammar topics without being too prescriptive.

Phase II Level	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Simple past • Simple present • Simple future • Past/present: <i>to be, to have</i> • Present progressive • Capitalisation • Punctuation: <i>period, question mark</i> • Word order: <i>subject, verb, object</i> • Subject-verb agreement • Articles • Plurals • Nouns: <i>count and non-count</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pronouns: Subjective: <i>I, you, etc.</i> • Pronouns: Objective: <i>me, you, etc.</i> • Pronouns: Possessive – determiner: <i>my, your, etc.</i> • Pronouns: Possessive – nominal: <i>mine, yours, etc.</i> • Adjectives/modifiers (<i>size, colour, shape</i>) • Prepositions of time • Prepositions of location • Questions: <i>who, what, where, when, why, how</i> • Adverbs of frequency: <i>always, sometimes, never</i>
Phase III Level	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pronouns: Reflexive: <i>myself, yourself, etc.</i> • Adjectives/modifiers (<i>size, colour, shape</i>) • Negatives: <i>not, -n't</i> • Punctuation: <i>comma, apostrophe</i> • Conjunctions • Expressions for telling time • Numbers: <i>ordinal & cardinal</i> • Irregular past tense • Use of <i>because</i> • Modals of politeness • Future tense: <i>will, going to</i> • Adjectives: <i>comparatives and superlatives</i> • Possessives: <i>-’s</i> • Past habitual: <i>used to</i> • Adverbs of manner: <i>slowly, badly, etc.</i> • Imperatives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Superlatives • Tag questions • Irregular verbs • Irregular plural forms (<i>ex. wolf – wolves</i>) • Antonyms, synonyms • Questions: <i>which</i> • Modals of possibility: <i>could, may, might</i> • Compounds: <i>someone, anyone, no one</i> • Modals of advice: <i>should, could, may, etc.</i> • Modals of obligation: <i>must, have to, etc.</i> • Conditional with <i>if</i> • Comparisons: <i>same as, different from, like, etc.</i> • Direct vs. indirect speech • Contractions: <i>can't, isn't, wasn't</i> • Affixes: <i>dis-, un-, in-, ab-, re-, -able</i> • Compound words (<i>ex. homework</i>)
Beyond	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Either/or, neither/nor • Comparisons: <i>As...as...</i> • Not only...but also... • Idioms • Punctuation: <i>colon, semi-colon</i> • Past perfect • Present perfect • Future perfect 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Past progressive • Future progressive • Relative clauses with <i>who, whom, which, that</i> • Passive voice • Phrasal verbs • Figures of speech: <i>simile, metaphor, personification</i>

A Model of Strategy Instruction

Explicit strategy instruction can be challenging. This simple model breaks down the process of teaching strategies.

How to Teach Strategies

Name the strategy

Give the strategy a name.
Naming it helps learners remember it.

Explain it

Give learners details of what the strategy involves.

Demonstrate it

Give a demonstration to the class of the strategy in action.

Practice it

Allow learners to practice using the strategy in “real-life” communicative situations within the classroom.

Use it

Regularly encourage learners to use it in a variety of situations. Help them recognize the strategy in action.

Sample Essential Skills Project Plan

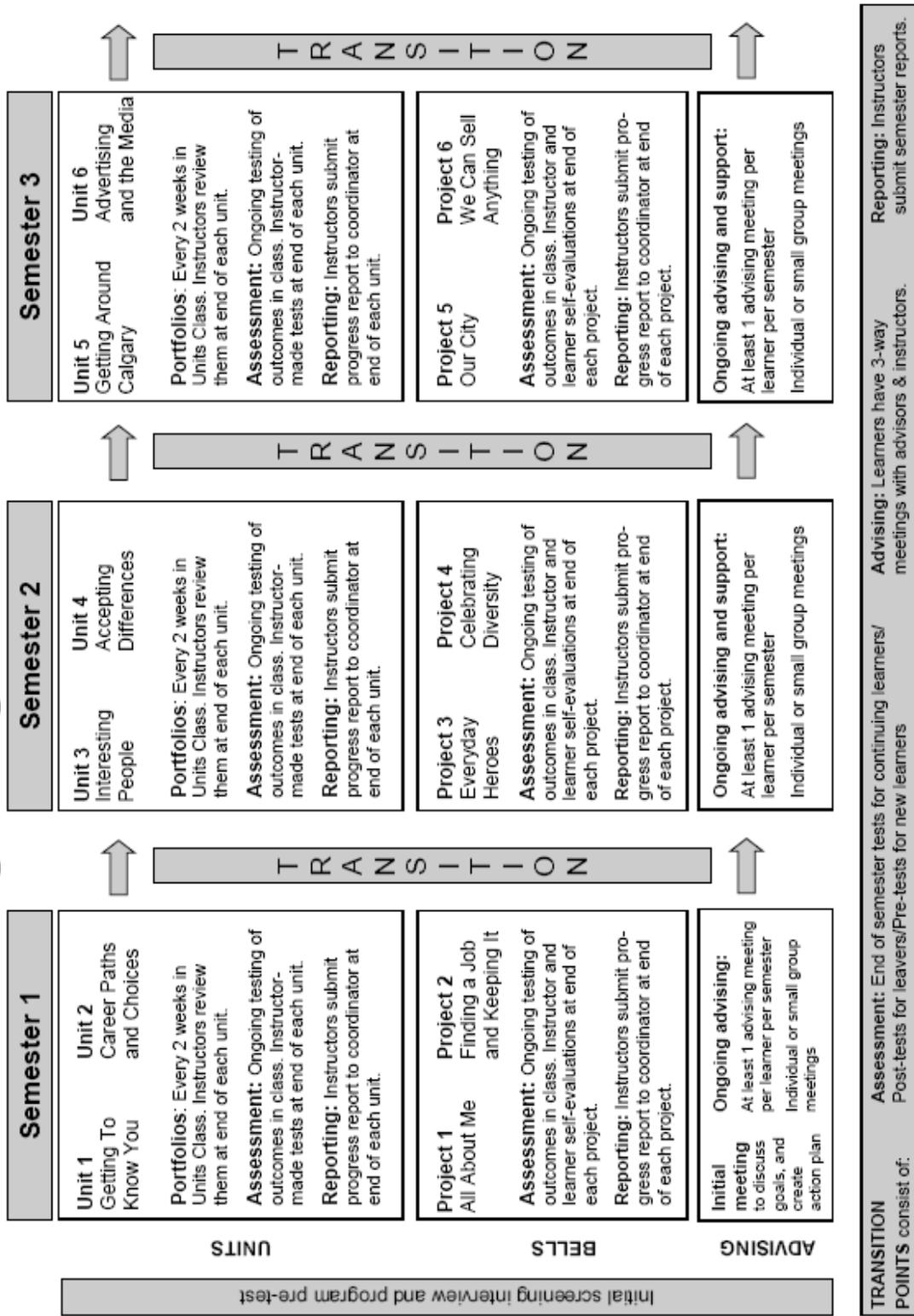
A detailed project plan such as this is necessary to facilitate effective project-based learning.

<h3>Project 2: <u>Healthy Lifestyles</u></h3> <p>Connected to Unit 2: Feeling Great</p>	
<p>Driving Question: How can youth in Calgary, especially youth living on low incomes, make sure they lead healthy lifestyles?</p>	
<p>Rationale: —focuses on group skills while researching information about healthy living and lifestyles for youth —explores possibilities for learners to live healthier even on a low budget — gives learners power to share important real-life information with others</p>	
<p>Essential Skills Focus: (Group)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Manage your time using a calendar 2. Perform self evaluation to know your strengths and challenges 3. Demonstrate decision-making skills 4. Be responsible to your group by getting work done and helping others 	
<p>Introduction: Discuss healthy vs. unhealthy; what is poverty/low income? Are the two concepts connected? Read article on healthy lifestyle choices Share prior knowledge. Groups ideas into categories (eg. Food, exercise) Introduce driving question; discuss project ideas, audience, and final event</p>	<p>Assessment: Quiz on knowledge of good/bad teamwork. Reflections on teamwork. Observations of team members. Quiz on 5 tips for planning and making decisions. Computer use assignments requiring a # of emails/postings. Quiz on the value of self-evaluation. End of project self-evaluations and teacher evaluations. Short reflective exit slips. Calendar checks. Observed calendar use.</p>
<p>Development: Prepare for fieldwork/research. Identify questions to answer. Discuss options for finding info. Instructor gives teams several pre-selected sources of info. Instructor provides scaffolding to assist learners in simple research. Do field work/research to answer questions. Discuss & represent new info gathered.</p>	<p>Topic support: -photos to compare healthy/unhealthy activities -connection of poverty/low income to health -break health into topics/areas such as food, exercise, stress, smoking, sexual health, etc. -fields trips or presenters on topics such as: sexual health, food bank, food clubs, drop-in shelters, etc. -connect learners to health services in the college and the community</p>
<p>Conclusion: Organize Healthy Living Expo (tables with info/handouts, snack table, posters, activities, etc.) Prepare and host event. Evaluate the event through the eyes of an outside group. Write the story of the project and summarize learning (skills and topic) in a group constructed text.</p>	<p>Skill support: Info/Class generated list of good/bad team player skills. Self-evaluations/observation checklists of team player skills. 5 tips for planning and making decisions with others, + opportunities to explicitly use the tips. Simple email/discussion board posing methods and etiquette. Use article/discussion to teach value of self-evaluation in school/workplace. Give calendars, teach what things go in, check regularly.</p>
<p>Final Event: Learners host a Healthy Living Expo to teach youth/others about healthy lifestyles.</p>	

Overview of Bridge Program

Visuals like this give staff and stakeholders a solid overview of the major elements of the program.

Bridge Program Overview



Sample Assessment Rubric

Use well-crafted rubrics to clearly identify the criteria by which learner performance will be evaluated.

Rubric for Assessing Learner Writing

Write a variety of paragraphs (descriptions)

Phase III

Instructions for use: First, indicate any special conditions for the task, such as instructor support. Second, assess how well the writer met the purpose of the task and circle the relevant box. Third, circle the box in each row that best describes that characteristic of the writing. Add the values of the circled boxes and write the total score at the bottom. Finally, write the overall level attained by looking holistically at the levels and deciding which one best describes the writing sample.
Remember: Proficiency levels vary depending on purpose, context, etc. A writing sample is a snapshot of proficiency at a certain time.

Special Conditions:

<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	Details:
--	----------

Writing Purpose:

<i>The writing...</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>clearly tells a story or relates events</i> • <i>is in paragraph form, indented or block style</i> • <i>is relatively clear and easy to read; printing is legible and fairly consistent</i> 			
The writing meets the purpose of the task as outlined above.	<table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width: 33%; text-align: center;">No (0 points)</td> <td style="width: 33%; text-align: center;">Marginally (5 points)</td> <td style="width: 33%; text-align: center;">Yes (10 points)</td> </tr> </table>	No (0 points)	Marginally (5 points)	Yes (10 points)
No (0 points)	Marginally (5 points)	Yes (10 points)		

Writing Characteristics:

	Phase II Adequate (1 point)	Phase III Initial (2 points)	Phase III Developing (3 points)	Phase III Adequate (4 points)
Grammar	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • demonstrates some awareness of basic SVO order and simple structures and tenses, though without much accuracy • run-on sentences occur frequently 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • several one clause sentences • demonstrates some control of simple tenses and sentence structures 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • several simple and compound sentences • attempts some more complex tenses and sentence structures with a little success 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • uses a greater variety of simple and compound sentences • attempts more complex sentences fairly successfully
Vocabulary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • uses high frequency words and some more common, familiar words without assistance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • uses common, familiar words • unfamiliar words and phrases are provided by teacher 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • uses some less common words and phrases • uses more descriptive language specific to needs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • uses specific, descriptive vocabulary and less common words and phrases • uses some idiomatic language appropriately
Spelling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • uses invented spelling for most words • some high frequency words and personal information words are spelled accurately 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • high frequency words spelled with some errors • some invented spelling of familiar words 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • high frequency words spelled accurately • a few errors in spelling of familiar words • invented spelling of complex vocabulary 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • very few errors in spelling common, familiar words • some invented spelling of less common words and more complex vocabulary
Organization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • short text of several sentences, somewhat fragmented • sentences may be arranged to look somewhat like a paragraph but they do not support 1 main idea • very few no connecting words 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • up to 7 sentences or 1 paragraph, indented or block style • some evidence that sentences are organized or ordered • attempts a few connecting words and sequencing phrases with some difficulty 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2-3 paragraphs, indented or block style • topic and supporting sentences are present at times and convey ideas somewhat effectively • somewhat clear beginning, middle, and end • uses some connecting words and sequencing phrases with success 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3 or more paragraphs, indented or block style • conveys main ideas with topic and supporting sentences fairly clearly • clear beginning, middle, and end • uses connecting words and sequencing phrases appropriately

Date: _____ Instructor: _____ Student: _____ Total: ___ / 26 Level: _____

Sample Self-Assessments of Strategy Use

Use self-assessments to help learners focus on their strategy use and to set goals for improving.

Phase III Self-Assessment Checklist of Reading Strategies

Name: _____ Date: _____

Reading Strategies Self-Assessment

Check one box for each statement.

	Often	Sometimes	Almost never
1. I make predictions and read to find out if I was right.			
2. I reread the sentences before and after a word I do not know.			
3. I look quickly for information without reading everything.			
4. I look for the main idea and try to summarize the main events in my own words.			
5. I try to retell the story in the correct order.			

Which strategies do I want to practice more often?

Phase II Self-Assessment Checklist of Writing Strategies

Name: _____ Date: _____

What did I do before, during and after writing?

- I thought about what to write and talked to someone else about it.
- I decided what ideas I would use in my writing.
- I put my ideas in the order I would use them in my writing.
- I used topic sentences in my writing.
- I edited and revised my writing.

What can I do next time to make my writing better?

Sample Strategy Self-Assessments (Cont'd)

Self-Assessment: Focus on Strategies

Student Name: _____ *Date:* _____

Class: _____ *Type of work/project:* _____

1. What strategy did you focus on today?

2. How did using this strategy help you?

3. What was easy or difficult about using this strategy?

4. What strategy do you want practice next time?

Sample Self-Assessments of Essential Skills

Use self-assessments to help learners learn about and evaluate their essential skills.

Self-assessment of group participation

Date: _____ Student Name: _____

In BELLS class, I worked in a group with these people:

We are working on a project called: _____

Here is my assessment of my participation in the group:

	Not really	A little	A lot
I asked for help from my partners when I didn't understand something.			
I asked my partners to explain their opinions.			
I listened carefully to my partners' opinions.			
I respected my partners' opinions.			
I made sure everyone in the group felt comfortable.			
I supported my partners by using respectful language and body gestures.			
I participated by sharing my ideas and asking others to share their ideas.			

The next time I do group work, I will try harder to _____

The next time I do group work, I would like to work with these people:

1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____

Self-assessment at end of essential skills project

Self-Evaluation for End of Project #2 Celebrating Multiculturalism

NAME: _____

DATE: _____

My College Readiness Checklist			
I feel I demonstrated the following...	Well	Somewhat	Rarely
1. Attendance/Punctuality (On Time)	_____	_____	_____
2. Active Participation in Class	_____	_____	_____
3. Respect and Good Attitude	_____	_____	_____
4. Responsible Team Member	_____	_____	_____
5. Completed My Tasks Independently	_____	_____	_____

During PROJECT 2, I showed strength in these skills...

During PROJECT 2, I learned that I need to improve these skills...

My BELLS Outcomes:	Y/N
1. I can manage my time using a calendar.	_____
2. I can use self-evaluation to know my strengths and challenges.	_____
3. I can demonstrate decision-making skills.	_____
4. I was responsible to my group by getting my work done and helping others.	_____

When I think about this project, I feel...

What I liked about PROJECT 2:

What I didn't like about PROJECT 2:

Sample Portfolio Requirements

Work with learners to set expectations for portfolios and ensure they receive a copy of the requirements.

LEARNER PORTFOLIOS

Your portfolio must include...

- Table of Contents
- Learner Reflection
- Long Term Goals (Action Plan)
- Short Term Goals
- Short Term Goals Reflection
- Paragraph (description or opinion)
- Formal or Informal Letter
- Longer Text (description or essay)
- Research Presentation (2-3 minutes)
- Optional Piece(s) (Selected piece from Units or BELLS class)
- Short Reflection for each Optional Piece

All pieces must be dated and entered on the Table of Contents
At least **one** written piece must include multiple drafts.

Learner Self-Reflection on Portfolio Contents

Use portfolio reflections and self-evaluations to help learners see progress, celebrate success and set personal goals.

Why I Chose This Work For My Portfolio

1. I chose this piece because

2. I would like you to see that

3. One thing I would like to improve next time is

Expectations for Class Visits

Create a structured learning experience when setting up class visits by articulating clear expectations for both learners and instructors when arranging class visits.

Expectations for BRIDGE Students' Class Visits

Host Instructors are expected to:

- ❖ Be open to receiving a very short introductory email message from the visiting BRIDGE student before the class visit.
- ❖ Reply to the introductory message with a very short (1 or 2-sentence) reply before the class visit.
- ❖ Meet, welcome and introduce the visiting BRIDGE student on the day of the visit.
- ❖ Be open to answering a few simple questions from the visiting BRIDGE student after class (**or** ask a willing student in the instructor's class who could volunteer to be interviewed by the visiting BRIDGE student either before or after the class visit).
- ❖ Be open to receiving a short thank you email message from the visiting student.

Visiting BRIDGE students are expected to:

- ❖ Send an email message to the host instructor before the class visit to introduce self, inform/remind host instructor of date and time of visit, and thank host instructor in advance.
- ❖ Arrive at least 5-10 minutes early at the room for the class visit and stay until the class is over.
- ❖ Meet and introduce self to the host instructor before the class begins.
- ❖ Sit in the class, watch, listen, pay attention, participate (if possible and appropriate) in the class activities.
- ❖ Take a few notes about what happens in the class: how many students, what they do, what the class environment is like, etc.
- ❖ Not interrupt or take the host instructor's attention away from the class unless first approached by the host instructor.
- ❖ After the visit, thank the host instructor and ask if it is possible to ask some interview questions to the instructor or a willing student from the program.
- ❖ Complete the 5-10 minute interview with the host instructor or the student.
- ❖ Thank the host instructor or student.
- ❖ Send a thank you email message to the host instructor.
- ❖ Be prepared in BRIDGE classes to share information and impressions about the career program class visit and the post-visit interview.

Next Steps...

Congratulations! You have worked through the three stages of successful transitioning. We hope that by working through all the sections, especially the action items, you have developed your own sense of how this framework applies to your particular circumstance. Whether you are in a rural setting or an urban centre, whether you are part of a large institution or a small, local organization, and whether you are working with young immigrant literacy learners or a different target group with similar needs, the three stages can inform your program development and ongoing evolution.

Remember the word *evolution*. The best programs are always undergoing a process of evolution to ensure that they meet the evolving needs of their audience. To help your program remain successful, make sure to keep abreast of changing aspects of your program environment such as learner needs and barriers, workplace and educational opportunities for learners and the pre-requisites for those opportunities, as well as funding regulations and the professional development needs of instructors.

Being responsive to learners' needs and changing circumstances is demanding, but research and experience show that it is worth it! Young immigrant literacy learners need post-high school learning opportunities that focus on language, literacy, strategies, and essential skills. They need structured ongoing coaching and support to transition successfully from their more familiar high school setting to other educational or employment opportunities. They need the kind of program that this framework describes.

We hope that you have found this framework useful. Continue to use it as your program evolves, and allow it to focus your efforts on the three stages of successful transitioning. Good luck!