



In this issue of literacy.ca EXPRESS you'll find an overview of literacy-related developments at the national level.

On the national scene...

Office of Literacy and Essential Skills (OLES)

OLES has announced that in order to ensure a strong national network, it will provide "results- and performance-based multi-year contribution funding" to national literacy organizations to enable them to achieve five main goals:

- 1- To strengthen and expand networks;
- 2- To promote active partnerships;
- 3- To lead organizations in the recognition and integration of literacy and essential skills in, and for, the family, community and workplace;
- 4- To increase access to information specific to the organization's national scope and unique knowledge through annual reports;
- 5- To maintain the organization in an administratively sound and accountable manner to support the performance of its mandate and ongoing accountability to stakeholders and members across the country.

This news is most welcome as it will allow MCL to address needs that the field has identified as necessary to a quality literacy system and strategy.

Growing support for literacy

To put this in a wider context, the next several years should be interesting in terms of the development of a national strategy for adult learning, which includes adult literacy. There are indications that support is growing. Over the past year or so a number of highly credible groups have weighed in - we reported on some of these in September. The latest development is a report released on November 15 by the Canadian Policy Research Networks (CPRN). *Towards an Effective Adult Learning System: Report on a Series of Regional Roundtables* follows up the 2006 report *Too Many Left Behind: Canada's Adult Education and Training System*. These documents strongly validate the importance of addressing the needs of adults at the lowest levels of literacy and education.

Some recommendations widely endorsed at the regional roundtables include:

- Develop, in collaboration with all stakeholders, a policy framework centred on the right to learn. Engage community groups in the process and in ongoing policy development.
- Develop a more integrated adult learning system that facilitates learner pathways.
- All players should work to foster partnerships among all levels and departments of government, aboriginal communities, program providers, sectoral organizations, business, and labour, building on existing mechanisms wherever possible.
- Each sector (eg, school boards, colleges, universities, community providers, employers, unions, governments) should work on principles to promote a more effective and integrated adult learning system from the perspective of their sector. Then representatives of each sector should come together to work on a common action plan.
- Address communal and societal goals as well as individual objectives. Foster life skills and active citizenship and not just job skills. Recognise that adult learning may and should involve multiple objectives: student success, family success, community success, economic prosperity and social cohesion.
- Build into the mandate of all institutions of learning a responsibility to contribute to the development of community and social well-being and hold them accountable for meeting this part of their mandate.
- Many of the action items would benefit from inter-governmental cooperation to maximize their effectiveness. Coordinated action is required, involving governments as well as service providers, employers and others. Participants from across the country, from government, aboriginal organizations, business, labour, colleges, universities and community groups have pointed the way towards a more coherent and effective adult learning system.

Sound familiar? It's what we've been saying for years. But this is good. Before, we were a voice in the wilderness. Now, a growing number of voices are singing from the same songbook.

CMEC Pan-Canadian Interactive Literacy Forum

The Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (CMEC) is planning an interactive electronic forum on April 14-15, 2008. This event will link participants at ten sites across Canada (New Brunswick, Quebec, Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta, BC, Yukon, NWT and Nunavut). Conference sites will be linked through Web technology to allow keynote presentations to be shared interactively among sites in real time. Each site will also have local speakers and activities. For more information, contact your provincial literacy coalition and check the CMEC website:

www.cmec.ca/literacy/forum.en.stm

MCL Update

Forward Planning

MCL is in the process of developing a new strategic plan for 2008-2011. At workshops in June and November, the MCL Board and Learners Advisory Network engaged in “forward thinking” after a very difficult couple of years. While the process is not finished, here are a few highlights:

We reaffirmed a vision in which all Canadians have the right to develop the literacy and essential skills they need to participate fully in our social, cultural, economic and political life.

We reaffirmed MCL’s mission as a national knowledge network and leadership organization which supports and advances literacy in Canada by:

- providing strong, effective leadership to a diverse literacy community
- working with national, provincial and territorial literacy organizations, the literacy workforce, and adult literacy learners to build capacity and coherence in the field
- working with other sectors to increase awareness, commitment and support and to ensure that literacy efforts are successful

In addition to the directions indicated by our mission, we identified the need to revitalize MCL as an organization through

- raising MCL’s profile with a fresh identity (possibly including a name change),
- broadening MCL’s base through a more inclusive board structure, and
- diversifying MCL’s funding

The Learners Voice at MCL

Chris Harwood has been contracted to facilitate the work of MCL’s Learner’s Advisory Network. At its recent meetings, the LAN shared a learners’ point of view with representatives from

- The Ottawa Public Library (*Getting to Know the Library* manual project)
- the Coalition for Community Safety, Health and Well-being (project on reducing crime through social development)
- The Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police (*Literacy and the Police in Canada* project – goal: to increase police awareness of the literacy challenges of many Canadians and encourage police involvement in community literacy)

In the coming months, LAN members will work with Chris to create a workplan for future activities. For the names and profiles of LAN members, check out the Learner section of MCL’s website at www.literacy.ca.

Updates on MCL's current projects

ESL Literacy

MCL's *Linkages* Forum in early November brought people working in the Literacy, English as a Second Language (ESL) and settlement fields together to talk about the literacy needs of second language learners, and the implications for policies and programs. Participants included literacy and ESL instructors, program managers, researchers, academics and federal and provincial funders (immigration departments). Almost 50 people attended the event.

The program included a presentation by Dr. James Simpson, a Research Fellow at the Centre for Language Education Research in the School of Education, University of Leeds, UK. Dr. Simpson shared the findings from two recent projects done with the UK's National Research and Development Centre for Adult Literacy and Numeracy: the ESOL Effective Practice Project, and the Placement Practices Project.

The program also included two panel presentations moderated by Nadine Valk of the Canadian Council on Learning. Two roundtable discussions provided the opportunity for people to talk about the key issues and to begin discussing how the sectors could work together. The cross-sector approach gave participants the opportunity to continue sharing information from their own perspectives and to also begin to understand the issues from other perspectives. The groups were encouraged to focus mostly on solutions to the challenges.

The final session of the day was a whole group activity to talk about next steps. The list included:

- Creating a common understanding of what ESL Literacy means
- Creating opportunities for cross-sector collaboration
- Conducting research that links practice to research and to connect with research in other countries
- Creating a pan-Canadian strategy and framework for ESL Literacy
- Creating opportunities for professional development for practitioners (literacy and ESL).

The group asked that a listserv be created to allow the discussion to continue. MCL Project Manager, Lindsay Kennedy, will work with NALD to set this up. The group also decided that starting to work on a pan-Canadian strategy and framework for ESL Literacy was the most important next step. This will be discussed on the listserv.

Literacy Sector Study

A sector study – or “industry profile” as it is called in some circles – can serve a number of purposes. It can raise the profile of a sector, and provide a snapshot of the characteristics and needs of the sector’s workforce, and help plan to meet the needs of the future.

Who is included in the field? Where do they work? What is their education and their opportunities for professional development? What policies and practices encourage or prevent people from entering or remaining in the field? What will be the challenges for the field in the future? What kind of workforce will be required, and what supports will they need to be effective? These are some questions that a sector study might explore.

In preparation for designing a study of Canada’s literacy sector, MCL has just completed an environmental scan. The scan tells us that most of what we know about literacy work is undocumented. It also tells us that literacy workers come to work with a wide range of skills and knowledge but very few are trained specifically to be literacy workers. More importantly, the environmental scan told us what we don’t know and what we really should know about the literacy field. Our next step will be to build on the scan to develop a proposal for a full sector study to answer important questions – like the ones above – about the literacy field across Canada. We hope to find appropriate partners and funder(s) for the project early in 2008.

Family Literacy

MCL’s family literacy project is looking at family literacy issues, needs and gaps. It will also determine an appropriate national role for MCL in supporting and advancing this crucial work. Project manager Lindsay Kennedy is “mapping” how family literacy is funded, who delivers it and how practitioner training is dealt with in each province and territory. The family literacy map will also describe the work that other organizations do that they describe as family literacy. These other organizations include family resource centres, libraries and national organizations involved in early childhood literacy.

The working group and the MCL board will review the paper before it is distributed more broadly.

Accountability Project

MCL is a partner in a multi-year project on accountability in the adult literacy field, led by The Centre for Literacy of Quebec.

Evaluation and accountability are crucial to the work we do in the literacy field. However, some of the current approaches to evaluation and accountability are not working as intended. This project will look at the impacts of current approaches as well as exploring alternatives.

The project steering committee members come from the partner organizations — Linda Shohet (The Centre for Literacy of Quebec), Lindsay Kennedy (MCL), Marina Niks (RIPal BC) and Sandy Middleton (Literacy BC). Project Manager David Hurley is working with steering committee members to bring together a Project Advisory Committee including funders, practitioners, researchers and others.

The literature and field reviews that link theory with practice are well underway. In the second year, providers and funders will engage in regional collaborative action-research projects to develop innovative models of reciprocal accountability; and invite continuous input as a way to share knowledge and build broad support and buy-in.

A project website is under development at www.literacyandaccountability.ca. Bookmark the site and check it regularly for updates!

We'd love to hear from you ...

We are always happy to hear your comments and questions. You can email us at: mcl@literacy.ca