

## Issues

**You identified questions and issues on your profiles that you hope to address or see addressed at the Institute. We have selected those related to the topic, i.e. to IALS and large-scale assessments of adult literacy, and grouped them by theme and frequency of appearance; some clearly fit more than one category. We have altered wording for clarity in a few cases. If we have misunderstood your intent, we can make corrections at the start of Day 1. Meanwhile, the list shows both common concerns and differences about the key issues. It raises some compelling questions.**

### IALS methodology

- I am interested in better understanding the IALS methodology, how it relates to the Essential Skills framework, and how it will influence the field of adult education in the future.
- How can the IALS methodology take into account cross-cultural settings, in assessment, and practice in programming and instruction, when the language of some learners is different than the language commonly used at work, for example, in order to better prepare providers for those contexts?
- Since there are still a lot of unknowns about learning how to read, should we not be looking at a variety of methods of assessment in the learning to read process in social contexts, and not as isolated competencies?
- Is the methodology that underpins IALS and subsequent surveys as valid today as it was when the assessments were first developed?
- Checking tests against the real-world demands on people's literacy and the skills they use to meet them.
- Equating other assessments with IALS
- I am interested in the development, impact and future direction of IALS and similar international literacy assessments.
- I am looking forward to a more fulsome understanding of IALS.

- Is there research about explicit instruction in informal learning?
- How do we effectively measure skills and confidence to best meet the needs of adult learners?
- Does the elimination of the census long form have an impact on the future of IALS (PIAAC)?
- Comparison of PIAAC to IALS – what can we expect?

### **Concern for those at lowest literacy levels**

- I'm primarily interested in what IALS and PIAAC can tell us about the learning needs of IALS Level 1 and Level 2 adults.
- Family Literacy and IALS – how do we focus on the positives when IALS is so negative?
- Is there a tension between focusing on workplace essentials skills vs. literacy skills for traditionally disadvantaged learners?
- What happens to adults whose reading levels would score at IALS level one when the Canadian government clearly states that it prefers to invest in adults reading at the IALS upper level two? Is this not systemic oppression and discrimination?
- Cognitive skills and other skills: what strategies do people with low skills use to overcome their shortcomings? Skills and intelligence: How much is it possible to overcome the deterministic approach of intelligence studies? I would like to see the results of different practical approaches to improve skills.
- Highly literate people are oblivious to the reality that 40% of Canadians require assistance with literacy skills. Supervisors are shocked to learn their employee cannot read a memo. The survey results are only useful if they trigger change to address those results. Low literacy issues are primarily addressed by volunteers or grass root practitioners. Classes for Level 1 adults are few, since it requires more time and money to prepare them for the workplace. Since funders primarily focus on workplace preparation, the fact that the low-literacy adults are also parents who teach their values to their children is being overlooked and another generation of low-literacy adults is being produced.
- Covering the abilities of those with the lowest literacy levels

## **IALS and non-dominant populations**

- I am particularly interested in how IALS has managed to focus on minority groups (e.g Franco-Ontarians); the move to understand literacy as a continuum and how this impacts literacy training amongst Franco-Ontarians.
- Validation of Aboriginal perspectives in literacy. Indigenous concerns of English literacy assessment tools (incorporating Aboriginal epistemology). Knowledge Control. Knowledge locating in whiteness. There is no concept of neutral literacies. It depends on who validates those concepts. The results of assessments are affected by the epistemological lens of the dominant culture.
- How are Aboriginal people being supported to create their own research tools, data, and analysis? Are Aboriginal people's worldviews and approaches really being heard and incorporated in this work? If so, how and where is this inclusion happening successfully? If not, what needs to happen to change the situation?
- Since "literacy" and "literacy policy" typically refer to the language of the dominant culture in most countries (e.g., English and French in Canada), what is the policy/practice issue of recognizing the literacies of other cultures? Aboriginal and indigenous languages, for instance. This would seem to have relevance to most of the themes as it goes to issues of defining and controlling literacy.

## **Applications of IALS**

- The most important question for me is that how to make the results of the large-scale assessments, especially PIAAC, more useful to practitioners. The data is very rich, (especially because of the uniqueness of PIAAC) and we'll have access to such massive amounts of data that we need to find ways to make them more accessible to the literacy field, enabling them to use the information not only to convince policy makers and other funders to support programs, but also for teaching and professional development approaches and resources.
- Can IALS help us identify priority areas to improve literacy?
- Creating assessments for adult literacy and numeracy that provide good information for teachers and adult learners.
- Can IALS inform the integration of information and learning technologies into literacy programming and workplace education, reflecting the current realities of adults in various contexts?

- I believe that we must be true to what works best with the students – AND relate our products and processes to things such as IALS only AFTER we've developed programs and practices.
- How can the research on IALS in this field help us to improve our practice?
- How has IALS affected classroom instruction?
- The concern I have is that well-developed curriculum that builds on each IALS level in a logical and appropriate manner be developed with current resources.
- How can we most effectively use IALS results to plan and deliver programming? How will IALS help convince employers to invest in training?
- Have the results of large-scale literacy assessments been used appropriately by governments and institutions to support good adult education policy and design effective instruction for adults?
- What are the best and most appropriate uses of data from surveys such as the IALS and its successors?
- Can IALS help us measure the effectiveness of literacy programs?
- Worried that IALS is increasingly seen as the way to measure program effectiveness where results of population literacy rates has implications for literacy and basic education programs for adults is extremely short-sighted and punitive.
- Embedding practice – m would like to gain a greater understanding of IALS and what it means for the work that we do day-to-day with our learners (assessment, learner gains, transition to work) workplace literacy.
- We would like to learn more about how to connect learners and employers with a common language and understanding about literacy skill development and what it means for the workplace.
- Government preference for empirical data and scientific research as evidence of programmatic outcomes undermines the status (value) of the adult literacy field.
- What was the impact of IALS at the time of its release? How were reaction and action linked to the IALS findings sustained? If action was not sustained, what are the lessons learned?

- IALS and its impact on policy, programming and the public
- What are effective strategies for helping learners move through the levels of complexity?
- How will “literacy” and “literacies” be understood, defined and, ultimately, supported in the 21<sup>st</sup> century? Without a sense of larger purpose and direction for adult literacy on what could be an international level, it seems that adult literacy is destined to continue to be a low priority for most policy-makers in many industrialized nations.
- What happens to the field of adult literacy and basic education/essential skills when governments and institutions incessantly focus on assessment and outcomes and not professional learning and development?
- How to best approach communicating PIAAC results?
- How can we use the data best to see the action we want?