

Fall Institute 2011

IALS (INTERNATIONAL ADULT LITERACY SURVEY)

ITS MEANING AND IMPACT FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE

October 23-25, 2011

Banff, Alberta

A market-based approach to solving Canada's literacy challenge



TOWES Prime

Online Assessment & Instruction

BOW VALLEY
COLLEGE

Raising literacy levels is central to Canada's economic success:

- **From labour surplus to labour shortage:** even low skilled workers will get jobs
- **Rising skill supply in other countries:** competition able to match Canadian workers on price and quality
- **The emergence of global markets:** capital, R&D markets, production technology are available to all at the same prices,
- **Conclusion:** the only source of comparative advantage is workers' ability to apply technology in skill and knowledge intense jobs - literacy and numeracy are key to success in occupations at Level 3 and higher

Raising literacy levels is not straightforward:

- **There is a market failure:**
 - Employers and workers don't know they have the problem and don't have the tools to find out
 - Employers may think its not their problem to fix
 - Government doesn't have the fiscal resources to solve the problem and don't see it as their responsibility
 - There is little reliable information on outcomes or impacts to help individuals, employers or governments make informed investment decisions

The carrying capacity of the sector is limited:

- The intensity of many interventions is not sufficient to raise skills to the needed demand level
- Diagnostic practices do not ensure a good fit between learner needs and the intervention
- A wide variety of literacy providers
- Some instructors are poorly paid and under qualified
- Programs tend not to specialize

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Our solution: Fixing the market failure with information

- Better information for learners
- Better information for instructors
- Better information for funders



- The basic **Prime** suite of products comprises three distinct assessments and an instructional system
- Customized assessments and instructional systems will be developed for clients who have specific needs
- Reporting scales and proficiency levels are linked to the International Adult Literacy and Skills Survey (IALSS) scales and Essential Skills profile proficiency levels, PISA and PIAAC
- **Prime** products will provide valid, comparable and interpretable estimates of skill in:
 - Prose and Document Literacy
 - Numeracy
 - Oral Fluency
 - Reading components

Available in English, French and a range of other languages





Focus Measurement

- A scalable measurement tool
- Will efficiently group learners for instruction
- Will be the tool of choice for system accountability
- Results reported as a skill Level or as a score on the IALS 500 point scale





Scaffold Instruction

- Provides customized instructional responses to the learning needs identified by the assessment system
- World's first instructional system to embody the theory used to assess Kirsch/Mosenthal framework
- Linked to Vygotsky's Zones of Proximal Development
- Designed to efficiently increase skills from 2 to 3



Foundation Diagnosis

- A diagnostic tool for literacy Levels 1 & 2
- Will provide information for effective grouping of participants for instruction
- Provided, through sponsorship from donors like Nexen Inc., at low or no cost to organizations serving disadvantaged communities

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Sharp Certification

- A high stakes assessment
- Sharp will be the tool of choice for recruitment and workforce development
- Results are reported on the IALSS 500 point scale and as a skill level

Attributes of the Prime suite:

- Web-based delivery uses adaptive algorithms which provide immediate feedback
- Multiple precision levels to support multiple uses:
 - Program triage, formative assessment, summative assessment, learning gain and certification
- Low cost
- Low technical burden
- Diagnostic score reports for learners, instructors and on the likely benefits of the prescribed training
- Linked to IALSS, PISA, PIAAC and ES scales
- Available in multiple languages:
 - Canadian English, Canadian French
 - Spanish, Portuguese, Arabic, Chinese, Russian, Italian, Bhasa, Hindi, Telegu, Tamil (in development)

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Development Partners

- DataAngel Policy Research – Scott Murray
- Polymetrika Inc. – Fernando Cartwright
- Performance by Design – Mike Hardt
- TOWES Department at Bow Valley College



DataAngel's information products for decision makers:

- Community report cards for prose literacy
www.dataangel.ca
- Literacy maps for Census sub-Divisions www.ccl-cca.ca
- Literacy report cards for Federal Ridings
www.dataangel.ca
- Segmentation analyses of literacy markets by province, industry, occupation, immigrant status, Aboriginal status
- Addressing Canada's Literacy Challenge: A Cost-benefit Analysis www.dataangel.ca

Building the evidence base on ROI and best practice:

- The SRDC randomized controlled trial in the Food and Accommodation industry
- The ACCC quasi-experimental study with college students and workers
- The Literacy Alberta Grocery sector project
- TOWES is the assessment used in these 3 studies

What's missing?

- A mechanism to update occupational demand profiles
- Funding formulae that reduce incentives to cream
- A mechanism for tracking efficiency and funding formulae that incent programs to move to the production frontier
- A system for certifying instructors
- Mechanisms to incent employers to invest