

# Our Voice

**Community Literacy of Ontario**

**80 Bradford Street  
Suite 508**

**Barrie, Ontario  
L4N 6S7**

**Tel: 705-733-2312  
Fax: 705-733-6197**

**www.nald.ca/clo**

**clo@bellnet.ca**



## INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| <a href="#">Overview of Assessment within OALCF</a> | 1   |
| <a href="#">OALCF: Task-Based Programming</a>       | 2   |
| <a href="#">Stages of Assessment</a>                | 3   |
| <a href="#">Milestones</a>                          | 4   |
| <a href="#">Culminating Tasks</a>                   | 5   |
| <a href="#">Selected Assessment Tools</a>           | 6-7 |
| <a href="#">OALCF Assessment Webinars</a>           | 8   |

## Overview of Assessment within the OALCF

*By Karen Geraci, for Community Literacy of Ontario*

Assessment in educational contexts refers to a process of gathering information for making decisions. In literacy programs, assessment is typically used to gather information about learners’ knowledge and skills, with the goal of offering programming that builds on existing knowledge and skills. Assessment also helps to identify areas where new knowledge and skills areas are required. In addition, assessment provides key information in helping learners set realistic, achievable goals.

Assessment of the Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) Program’s overall performance is also important to the public and the government. The Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities’ (MTCU) Performance Management Framework has three performance measures related to learner achievement: learner progress, completion of goal path and learner gain. Gains assessment provides data for program accountability and is typically used to make comparisons between programs and client demographics; to identify trends; and to inform decisions at the program and/or policy level. MTCU has indicated its intention to have gains testing administered within the LBS system and programs can expect to hear more about this in the future.

Under the Ontario Adult Literacy Curriculum Framework initiative, LBS programs are using a newly designed curriculum framework, using three levels to describe developing proficiency. These levels are informed by the same factors that drive complexity in levels 1 to 3 of the Essential Skills. There is also a new complement of assessment tools including milestones and culminating tasks. Yet while there is much that is new, the basic principles of learner-centred, goal-directed learning remain the same.

Assessment under OALCF will continue to draw on a variety of tools depending on the purpose of the assessment, the learners’ goals and interests, and the nature of the literacy program in which the learner participates. In addition to the assessment tools that LBS programs have found valuable in the past, milestones and culminating tasks will now be added to their collection. As learners successfully complete the day-to-day learning activities, milestones, and, if appropriate, a culminating task included on their learner plans, results will be recorded in the Employment Ontario Information System – Case Management System (EOIS-CaMS) so that learner achievements can be communicated to MTCU.

# OALCF: Task-Based Programming

Much has been said of the shift away from the LBS Learning Outcomes, which described learning using academic, skills-based language, to the Ontario Adult Literacy Curriculum Framework, which uses as its foundation a task-based approach. While the two approaches are not mutually exclusive, the shift to task-based programming places an emphasis on learning and demonstrating skills development within authentic tasks and contexts. In other words, the focus isn't on the skills themselves but on how someone *uses* the skills.

Here is an example:

*A learner attends a literacy program wanting to improve her math skills. Specifically, she wants to be able to manage her household budget and improve her consumer awareness. In a strictly skills-based program, numeracy instruction might focus almost exclusively on the mathematical operations the learner needs to be able to perform: adding, subtracting, multiplying and dividing decimals; calculating percentages, etc.*

*Task-based programming looks at things the other way around, starting with the tasks the learner wants to be able to perform, and contextualizing skills development within those tasks. In this case, instruction would still involve skills development, but the learner would frequently be given the opportunity to apply those skills within a task such as paying a bill, balancing a chequebook or establishing monthly household expenses.*

Task-based programming attempts to make it clear to learners *why* the learning is taking place. Isolated skills drills are left aside in favour of meaningful, authentic tasks that require the individual to identify what's required and apply the necessary combinations of skills. Of course, for many programs, this approach won't be new at all.



Under the OALCF, assessments that use a task-based model will be more in tune with what learners understand their learning to be on a day-to-day basis. The task-based nature of the OALCF is also what connects it strongly to the Essential Skills framework. The three OALCF levels are informed by the same factors that drive task complexity in Essential Skills levels 1, 2 and 3 (which are in turn derived from the IALS scale). Thus, any instructional materials and assessment tools derived using the IALS (The International Adult Literacy Survey) or Essential Skills scale can be easily interpreted within the OALCF system.

For more on task-based programming, see the OALCF resource *Practitioner Guide to Task-Based Programming* (2011), available at [www.tcu.gov.on.ca/eng/eopg/publications/OALCF\\_Task-Based\\_Prog\\_Mar\\_11.pdf](http://www.tcu.gov.on.ca/eng/eopg/publications/OALCF_Task-Based_Prog_Mar_11.pdf)



# Stages of Assessment

Assessment is carried out for different reasons at different points in LBS programs. From the practitioner's perspective, it is often helpful to consider when the assessment occurs and the purpose it serves. Examined from this point of view, it is common to refer to initial, ongoing and exit assessment.

Two fundamental considerations when deciding on an appropriate assessment tool are context and skill level. Using an assessment that provides information about learners' skill levels in a transparent way, connected to the levels used within the program is preferred. Tools that report using the Essential Skills levels may prove useful, or program staff can analyze their current assessment tools against the Curriculum Framework to understand the competencies, task groups and levels assessed.

An assessment is likely to provide more accurate and meaningful information when its context is similar to either the learner's goal or the program's instructional focus. Ideally, these two elements come together, with assessments that reflect the LBS program's content and the learner's interests and goal. For example, using an assessment tool that comprises tasks taken from everyday life to assess learners who have an independence goal and using an academically-oriented assessment for learners whose goal is secondary school credit.

## Initial Assessment

The OALCF resource, *Selected Assessment Tools* (2011), describes initial assessment as being conducted to "place a learner or assign a level." (p.6). This resource can be found at ([www.tcu.gov.on.ca/eng/eopg/publications/OALCF\\_Selected\\_Assessment\\_Tools\\_Mar\\_11.pdf](http://www.tcu.gov.on.ca/eng/eopg/publications/OALCF_Selected_Assessment_Tools_Mar_11.pdf)). Initial assessments can be administered before programming begins in order to make referrals to appropriate literacy or other service providers. They can also be administered at the point when a learner begins his or her literacy program, in which case results are also used to begin the process of developing a training plan. It may take some time for LBS programs to understand the relationship between existing initial assessment tools they currently use and the levels, competencies and task groups comprising the Curriculum Framework. Nevertheless, an analysis of an assessment tool will provide useful information about assessment results and learners' abilities as described in the Curriculum Framework.

## Ongoing Assessment

Ongoing assessments are used to monitor progress, identify ways to help learners develop their abilities, and identify any barriers to learning or achieving their goals. The results are used to inform programming and any adjustments that need to be made in a learner's plan. The OALCF *Selected Assessment Tools* resource notes that ongoing assessment is "interconnected with learning and often indistinguishable from learning activities" and that it is often informal and "involves learners in a very interactive and highly collaborative way". (p.6)

## Exit Assessment

Exit assessments are administered at the end of a program. They help determine the skills and knowledge learners have gained through their programming and to identify whether learners have achieved their learning goal. They can also help learners recognize changes they have made as the result of their participation in literacy programming, such as increased self-confidence and readiness to take on new challenges.

⇒ For more on assessment practices and principles, see *OALCF: Foundations of Assessment* (March 2011): [www.tcu.gov.on.ca/eng/eopg/publications/OALCF\\_Foundations\\_of\\_Assessment\\_March\\_2011.pdf](http://www.tcu.gov.on.ca/eng/eopg/publications/OALCF_Foundations_of_Assessment_March_2011.pdf)

⇒ For an overview of assessment practice within LBS, see the *Literacy and Basic Skills Service Provider Guidelines* (November 2011), available at [www.tcu.gov.on.ca/eng/eopg/publications/20111109\\_lbs\\_guidelines\\_2011.pdf](http://www.tcu.gov.on.ca/eng/eopg/publications/20111109_lbs_guidelines_2011.pdf)

# Milestones

Milestones are goal-related assessment activities. Each milestone is directly related to one task group and one level within the Ontario Adult Literacy Curriculum Framework. Each of the 60 milestones are intended to reflect the types of tasks learners are likely to perform once they transition out of the Literacy and Basic Skills program. As such, milestones use as their starting point documents, texts, situations and interactions drawn from employment, further education, further training and everyday life contexts. Learners demonstrate their ability to meet task demands by interacting with materials in the ways they would outside literacy programs.

Milestones are intended to complement other assessment approaches within the OALCF. Yet, they are unique within the LBS assessment spectrum in that they are standardized, aligned to the Curriculum Framework and linked to a goal path. As such, milestones give service providers a common way to describe learner performance for reporting and referral purposes without compromising the valued differences among service providers.

Milestones were developed in consultation with literacy practitioners. Their development included field trials with learners and practitioners across Ontario, as well as expert reviews for goal-relatedness, content, cultural and linguistic bias. Milestones have been adapted into French for use in Ontario's Francophone literacy programs.

Each milestone includes everything necessary for the practitioner to administer, score and interpret learner performance. This includes administration instructions, assessment tasks (e.g. documents, texts, writing prompts), questions for learners, scoring notes and evaluation criteria. Most milestones take between 20 and 40 minutes to administer, and a few more minutes to score. Some milestones have more open-ended time periods associated with them because they require learner preparation. There are no pre-imposed time limits on milestones other than those negotiated between practitioners and learners. Typically, milestones can be administered during regular programming.

The intent is that learners and practitioners work together to choose milestones that reflect a learner's goals. Typically, milestones will be chosen early in the program as a way to focus programming and help the learner set his or her own learning objectives. Those milestones will be recorded in TCU's Employment Ontario Information System (EOIS). Should a learner's goals or interests change, new milestones can be selected to replace ones chosen earlier or to add to the initial selection. Milestones are intended to be administered at a point where the learner and practitioner feel confident that the learner can succeed. Successful results are entered in EOIS-CaMS; in cases where a learner is unsuccessful, he or she can reattempt the milestone after a recommended period of time (usually a minimum of 6 weeks).

As a form of standardized assessment, it is expected that LBS programs will keep milestones content secure and use it only for its intended assessment purpose. Learners will only see milestone content under assessment conditions.

While milestones will provide an important marker along the learner's path, milestones alone will not define the scope of literacy programs. Literacy programs will address skill development as well as subject-specific content and knowledge related to a variety of tasks and activities to ensure learners are prepared for the requirements of their goals. Practitioners will continue to use their expertise to make programming decisions to help learners achieve those goals. More information about milestones, including the OALCF *Milestone User Guide*, will be available from MTCU in April, 2012.

# Culminating Tasks

A culminating task for a learner's goal path draws from different elements of the learner plan. Successful completion of the culminating task is one way for the learner to conclude that he or she has a reasonable chance of managing the expectations of his or her goal destination after leaving the LBS program. The purpose of a culminating task is to provide the learner, the literacy program and MTCU with one of three indicators that the learner has completed his or her learner plan. The other two indicators are the completion of goal-related learning activities and goal-related milestones. Like milestones, a culminating task will be included on the learner plan.



Six culminating tasks will be available for use in LBS programs in April 2012. As part of the development process, the tasks were reviewed by a number of LBS Program managers and/or practitioners in all cultural streams (Anglophone, Francophone, Native, and Deaf) and delivery sectors (community-based, school board and college). One culminating task has been developed for each goal path, while apprenticeship can draw upon one of two: one that has been focused on apprenticeship training, and the other on shorter-term skills training. It is anticipated that additional culminating tasks will be developed.

Culminating tasks are considered complex, in that they are drawn from more than one competency and task group, and culminating in that they represent the end of the learner's goal path. Learning activities, milestones and integrated tasks will all help learners see the progress they have made during their program. However, culminating tasks are unique in that only those by learners who complete all elements on their learner plan and who are ready to transition to the goal destination will attempt one. Criteria will be available to help practitioners identify whether a learner should attempt a culminating task. It is important to note that not every learner will complete a culminating task. Practitioners will need to consider the relevancy of the learner's goal and the culminating task for the goal path to make a determination of who should attempt a culminating task.

Successful completion of a culminating task is one way for learners to demonstrate that they may be ready to transition to their goal destination in one of the five goal paths. Successful completion of a culminating task will be tracked for accountability purposes. LBS Programs will be asked to report on whether the learner has successfully completed the culminating task appropriate for his or her goal path. Programs will also report on whether a learner has completed the goal path requirements and selected milestones identified in the learner plan. There are many ways that LBS Programs will be able to report on positive learner outcomes; completion of the culminating task is just one of them.

The intention is that culminating tasks will help in service coordination with other Employment Ontario partners in that they provide some evidence of what a person can do when she or he is ready for transition.

For more on the culminating tasks, including how they are administered and scored, see *OALCF Culminating Tasks User Guide*, available from MTCU in April, 2012.



# Selected Assessment Tools

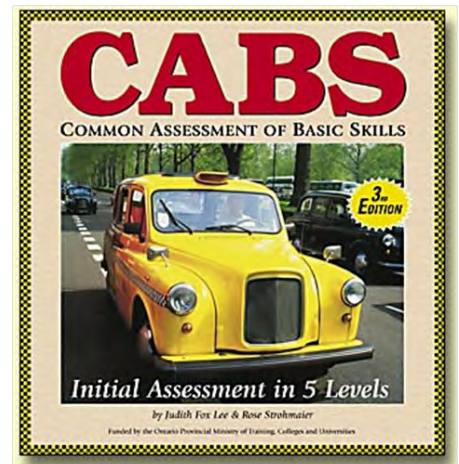
There are many assessment tools available for use in LBS programs. The following is a small sampling of tools which have been aligned or articulated to the Essential Skills scale, with brief descriptions of their intended uses.

The three OALCF levels are informed by the same factors that drive task complexity in Essential Skills level 1, 2 and 3, which should make the interpretation of the following tools easier for practitioners. For more assessment options, see *Selected Assessment Tools*, available at [www.tcu.gov.on.ca/eng/eopg/publications/OALCF\\_Selected\\_Assessment\\_Tools\\_Mar\\_11.pdf](http://www.tcu.gov.on.ca/eng/eopg/publications/OALCF_Selected_Assessment_Tools_Mar_11.pdf)

## CABS

CABS (Common Assessment of Basic Skills) comprises a series of literacy tasks which can be used for intake, ongoing or exit assessment purposes. The CABS manual is divided into five sections representing the five LBS levels. An articulation template is available to help literacy practitioners align CABS activities to the Essential Skills levels. The print version of CABS is available for purchase.

To access this resource , go to [www.lleo.ca/cabs3/index.html](http://www.lleo.ca/cabs3/index.html)



## CAMERA

CAMERA (Communications and Math Employment Readiness Assessment) is a series of standardized assessments designed for workforce literacy applications. The assessments employ real-life workplace documents and tasks to test and develop learners' reading, document use, writing and numeracy skills.

Drawn from Human Resources and Skills Development Canada's Essential Skills research, the documents and tasks together represent common activities in a wide variety of entry-level occupations and diverse employment settings. CAMERA is available for purchase and must be administered by trained assessors. For more information, go to [www.ptp.ca/publications/camera/](http://www.ptp.ca/publications/camera/)



# Selected Assessment Tools

## Measure-Up



The *How do your skills Measure Up?* website offers a variety of activities and resources to assist students and practitioners in Essential Skills evaluation. It is a product of the TOWES (Test of Workplace Essential Skills) assessment system (see below). Unlike TOWES, *Measure Up* is a non-standardized, informal tool that provides free self-assessment activities. Learners can explore career paths, test skills, and practice their Reading Text, Document Use, and Numeracy skills. Tips for using the Measure Up materials, as well as developing work-related materials are available on the website.

To access this resource, go to :<http://measureup.towes.com/>

## Ontario Skills Passport: Check-Up Tools

This free, online self-assessment tool helps the user gather information about his or her Essential Skills by completing realistic workplace activity sets. Online activities can be accessed by selecting an occupation or Essential Skill to be practiced. An individual can use his or her results to identify Essential Skills gaps, and OSP activity sets can provide practice. The Ontario Skills Passport was developed by the Ministry of Education.



For more information, see: <http://skills.edu.gov.on.ca/ESCTWeb/jsp/en/home.jsp>

## TOWES

TOWES (Testing of Workplace Essential Skills) was developed by Bow Valley College in Alberta. The system uses workplace documents to measure the Essential Skills of Reading Text, Document Use, and Numeracy. TOWES is aimed at employers wishing to improve the skills of their workforce. It can also be used in training contexts where the focus is on skills development for an employment context. It is available for purchase and administered in Ontario through 21 colleges.



To access this resource, visit: [www.towes.com](http://www.towes.com)

## OALCF Assessment Webinars

### CLO's BOARD OF DIRECTORS

- Debra Barrett (Toronto)
- Lorraine Bergstrand (Haldimand Norfolk)
- Elizabeth Debergh (Wellington County)
- Pierrette Desrochers-Kavanagh (Iroquois Falls)
- Keith Harford (Picton)
- Teresa Kerr (Peterborough)
- Barbara McFater (Toronto)
- Patti Miller (London)
- Marsha Roadhouse (Belleville)
- Johanna White (Red Lake)
- Lynne Zuliani (Wawa)

### CLO's STAFF

- Joan Beaudry (Office Administrator)
- Robyn Cook-Ritchie (Project Staff)
- Jette Cosburn (Co-Executive Director)
- Joanne Kaattari (Co-Executive Director)
- Vicki Trottier (Project Staff)

### MARCH 2012 NEWSLETTER

Writing by Karen Geraci  
Editing by Jette Cosburn

### FUNDER

Community Literacy of Ontario is funded by  
the Ontario government, under

**EMPLOYMENT  
ONTARIO**

In late March 2012, Community Literacy of Ontario is pleased to be hosting a two-part webinar series for LBS practitioners that will explore assessment and the Ontario Adult Literacy Curriculum Framework.

CLO's live webinars are fully booked. However, the webinars will be recorded and staff from all LBS agencies in Ontario will be able to easily access this training at a later date. Links to these webinars will be widely promoted to all stakeholders.

### WEBINAR #1: An Overview of the OALCF and Assessment

This two-hour webinar will cover the following:

- ⇒ What is assessment?
- ⇒ What are the effectiveness measures under the LBS Performance Management System?
- ⇒ Defining the categories of assessment under OALCF
- ⇒ Overview of OALCF milestones
- ⇒ Overview of culminating tasks



### WEBINAR #2: The OALCF—Exploring Assessment Tools and Developing an Assessment Strategy

This two-hour webinar will cover these topics:

- ⇒ Review of the effectiveness measures and performance indicators in the LBS Performance Management System
- ⇒ Selecting, administering and reporting on milestones
- ⇒ Administering and reporting on culminating tasks
- ⇒ Developing an assessment strategy
- ⇒ Evaluating the use of an assessment tool
- ⇒ Where do other tools fit into an assessment strategy?
- ⇒ Where do milestones and culminating tasks fit into an assessment strategy?

We are grateful to the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities for providing funding support for these webinars.