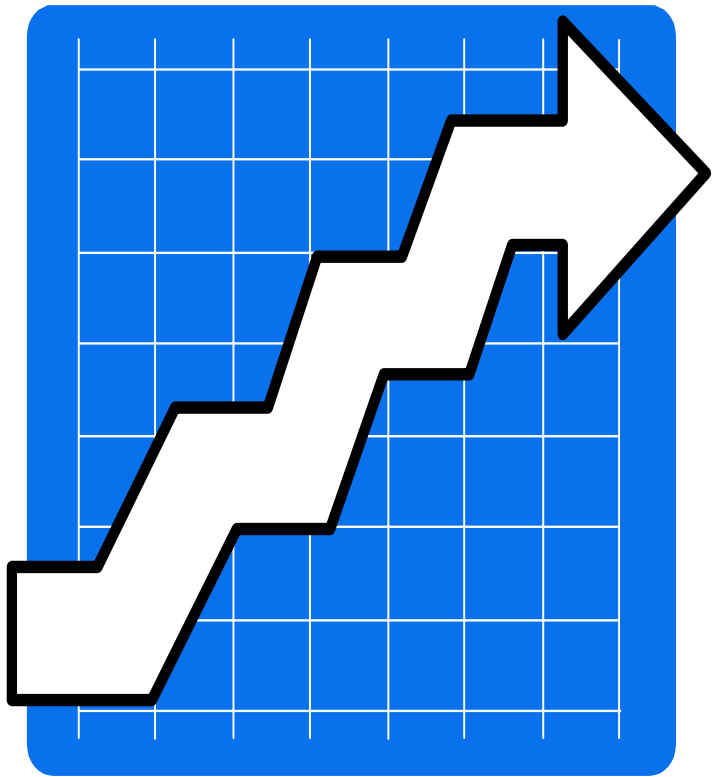


**Tough
Challenges:
Great
Rewards**



EVALUATION 2002

Evaluation of Literacy/Adult
Basic Education Program
2001-2002

Literacy Initiatives Secretariat
Department of Education
Charlottetown, PEI

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Executive Summary

Evaluation 2002 is a summative evaluation of the Literacy/Adult Basic Education Program that is administered, managed and delivered through the PEI Institute of Adult and Community Education (IACE), an affiliate of Holland College. The evaluation was conducted in February and March 2002 by Cindy Wood, on behalf of the Literacy Initiatives Secretariat, Department of Education.

The primary purpose of this annual evaluation is to collect information from learners and instructors participating in the Literacy/Adult Basic Education Program in Prince Edward Island to ensure that program standards and overall contractual obligations are met as in previous years, according to Section 5.2 of the annual contract for the administration, management and delivery of the program, recommendations will be acted upon by the college based on submission of a plan to do so prior to the signing of this [sic] contract.

Recommendations

1. Learning Environment

For the past two years, in the annual evaluation, the recommendation has been made to establish standards for learning environments at all learning centres. This issue arose again in Evaluation 2002. Some sites are very spacious, bright, and well equipped, whereas other sites are cramped with learners sitting elbow to elbow. One site has no access to a computer and others have many. A basic principle of adult education requires, among many things, physical comfort to be able to learn well. In Montgomery Hall, for example, with the loss of the downstairs classrooms, learners are in extremely close physical proximity. Adults are forced to literally climb over one another to get out of the rows in some cases. The move upstairs has certainly resulted in far from satisfactory learning conditions. Morell is another site, that when at full capacity, learners are in very close proximity. Merriam and Brockett, leading adult educators, in *The Profession and Practice of Adult Education: An introduction*, discuss physical space in relation to adult learners. They state,

It should come as scant surprise that the environment in which learning takes place plays an important role in successful learning. . . . Physical Environment refers to the actual space in which learning takes place. It is concerned with factors such as room size, temperature, lighting, acoustics, seating type and arrangements, and how technology is arranged and used in a learning space Not surprising, a learning space that is physically uncomfortable and with a layout that does not afford a comfortable degree of personal space will

detract from the learning process. (p. 149)

In addition to the lack of space in some classrooms, there is also the issue of lack of space for individual/private instruction and exam writing. In most cases individual instruction is taking place out in a very busy corridor or common area where there is no privacy and it is not quiet.

Also, in many areas there is no common area for breaks or lunch. Although this is not as important as the learning areas, it is still part of the physical comfort for learners to feel as though they have a space that is designed to eat lunch or relax. Learning opportunities are also found in lunch rooms.

1.1 Palmer Road

Palmer Road's facility has been under review for at least one year. Their location, at the Knights of Columbus building, is a makeshift classroom in the large hall. The location is spacious, but unfortunately, not at all private or free from distractions. Learners have requested a computer for their use at this site.

1.2 Science Labs

Science Labs have been an issue for the past few years and although there have been resources allocated to developing the science program it seems, according to both teachers and learners in Evaluation 2002, that there is still a lack of Science Labs. This must be addressed if science credits are to be granted. Arrangements can be made with the senior high schools.

1.3 Montague

Learners at the Montague site, although seemingly a newly constructed or renovated building, have concerns about the quality of air. This site received a very poor rating for air quality and students complained when the evaluator visited the site. This has been an ongoing issue.

2. Resources

At first glance the book shelves appeared to be stocked full of books. Although the evaluator did not formally take a tally of all resources, it seemed as though there were plenty of resources; however, students and instructors continue to ask for more resources. Is it possible to share some of the resources between sites when necessary? The problem here may be that students are requesting resources that can be taken home. Is it the responsibility of IACE to supply resources for learners to take home or is it the

responsibility of IACE to supply resources for learners at the site? If the problem is that there are not enough resources for learners to use on site then this is a real concern.

3. Intake Procedures

Intake procedures are inconsistent from site to site. This is clearly represented in the results. Only 45% of the learners stated the intake person looked at their credits from high school, 54% said they listed their prior work history, 68% wrote their goals and 30% designed a monthly learning plan. The funder's expectation is that 100% of students should be going through the same intake procedures.

4. Number of Students Enrolled

This is a difficult question to answer with any certainty from the information gathered though the evaluation. All instructors did not complete the questionnaires; therefore, the information is not complete. The instructors are an integral part of the overall evaluation. Direction from the director for their cooperation is required. In addition, there is a deeper concern that the numbers that IACE records do not accurately reflect the actual number of students physically in classes. This has a drastic affect on the waiting list. For example, if IACE has 20 learners registered in a class according to their records, but only 12 students show up on a regular basis - which number does IACE go by to determine the number of students they can accept?

The instructor-learner ratio ranged from 3 - 33 students with an average of 17. The contract states the ratio of 1:6 for Level One Learners and 1:12 for Level Two and Three Learners.

In total 346 learners completed the evaluations from February 25th to March 11th, 2002. The evaluator visited each site and personally delivered the questionnaires. During the same time period, IACE reports having 683 students enrolled. According to IACE, on March 11th there were 635 students enrolled in both day and night programs. There is a discrepancy of over 300 students.

5. Area of Personal Development

This is an area that is difficult to assess when using a survey type of instrument in evaluation. This area, for some learners, has been substantially improved by taking the program. Having spent more time with Level One Learners than others during the evaluation, it was very clear that the program resulted in a positive change in their self-esteem, self-respect, outlook on the future, and their health. With adults, the benefits of increasing their literacy skills may not become evident until they are put to use in a more formal setting - like a work setting. They may not realize the benefits immediately. There

were many comments that support the notion that increasing their literacy skills is something they are glad they are doing and feel proud of. At some point it would be interesting to study the area of personal growth in more depth. This survey, will never provide more insight into this area than it does at present. In-depth interviews and case studies would be beneficial for examining this area. It does not appear that these areas are not being affected by increasing literacy, but it is difficult to assess to what degree with this type of evaluation instrument. Often this area requires personal reflection after some time has passed.

Methods

Quantitative questionnaires, focused on the principles and practices of adult education, were used to gather data from both learners and instructors. In total there were four questionnaires used. These included questionnaires for instructors, Level One Learners, Level Two Learners and Level Three Learners. These questionnaires were similar to the questionnaires used since 1997. Learners were asked to evaluate different aspects of the program using three different scales: a four-point scale using *1 strongly disagree, 2 disagree, 3 agree and 4 strongly agree*; a three-point scale using *1 negatively, 2 no change, and 3 positively*; and a four-point scale using *1 poor, 2 fair, 3 good and 4 excellent*. The results are reported using these indicators. This method of evaluation produced a vast amount of data to analyze and report. IACE will be given a copy of individual site summaries, but due to the volume they have not been included in this report.

In the 2001 evaluation, IACE instructors requested that the evaluator personally administer the questionnaires to learners. The Literacy Initiatives Secretariat agreed to this request and in 2002 an evaluator visited each IACE site. This process, although time consuming, was extremely beneficial to the evaluator in assessing the data collection method. In light of this, both learner and instructor questionnaires will be revised to remove any ambiguity and to streamline the questionnaires. This also provided the evaluator with the opportunity to view each site's facilities, resources, as well as meet instructors and learners.

The evaluator administered and collected the evaluations at each site. Each group took approximately 15-25 minutes to complete the questionnaires. Level One Learners and some Level Two Learners required the evaluator to administer the evaluation individually or orally to the class because of low level reading skills.

In total 346 learners completed evaluations. This included 7 Level One Learners, 18 Level Two Learners, and 321 Level Three Learners. In addition, 81% or 35 out of a potential 43 instructors completed and returned the questionnaires.

Results

Learners

All responses were recorded individually according to site and then combined to determine a mean (average) response. The following results are based on the average of all responses across sites by learner level.

Level 1

Seven Level One Learners completed the questionnaires with assistance from the evaluator. Six said they had help from an instructor at program entry to look at their experiences with school, look at their work experiences, write their goals and make a monthly learning plan.

Learners were asked about their class and the curriculum. The responses were overwhelmingly positive. They *strongly agreed* that they liked the way class was run; they liked the things they studied in math, reading, and other subjects; and they were particularly enthusiastic about learning computer skills. They stated they *strongly agreed* that the program was friendly for all learners, they were learning things that would help them in the future, there were good materials to use, the skills would help them and their families and these skills will be useful for getting and keeping a job.

Learners rated that most aspects of the program have positively changed their lives. Specifically, their self-esteem and self-respect had changed for the better. The question relating to job performance was the only area that had not changed either positively or negatively.

When asked about their instructor and classroom setting, learners *strongly agreed* that the instructor was highly regarded and respected. Learners stated that they felt they were respected and accepted in their classroom. The physical classroom space was rated as *good to excellent*.

When asked for comments about changes they would like to see in the program, one learner each suggested: more materials, a gym and extra help with reading. Other general comments stated learners really enjoyed the program and felt it was excellent for those who wanted to return to upgrade their education. All seven learners plan to return in the fall.

Level 2

At program entry, 56% learners had the opportunity to look at their school records with their instructors, 44 % listed their work history, 69% wrote their goals, 47% designed a monthly learning plan and 94% have a long term goals.

Collectively, learners *agreed to strongly agreed* that they liked the way class is run, they liked the curriculum, the program meets their needs, they can afford to attend the program, there are good materials to use, and what they are learning is useful and will help them get and perform better in a job.

Learners stated that taking the program is changing their lives in a somewhat positive way. Areas being affected are self-esteem, reading skills, writing skills, communication skills and the ability to work as a team. Areas such as personal health, the ability to contribute to family life, general feelings about the future and knowledge of their community and province are also being affected in a positive way.

Learners *agreed to strongly agreed* that their instructors were available to them, help with monthly learning plans, use real life examples, use different methods of teaching, are well prepared and have extra materials. Learners feel comfortable in class, they feel their opinion is respected, the program has hours that suit their needs, and they are able to work in the classroom setting. Learners rated the physical classroom space as *fair to good*. In one site, Montague, learners rated the air quality as *poor*.

Comments ranged from issues with the physical space to learners needing more individual instruction. Overall comments were positive regarding the program and instructors. All learners, with one exception, plan to return in the fall.

Level 3

In response to Question 1: *When you entered the Adult Basic Education program, did you assist the instructor or coordinator with the following*: 45% stated they looked at their credits from school, 54% said they listed their prior work history, 68% wrote their goals and 30% designed a monthly learning plan. Considering that each student should have considered all these items in an intake interview the ratings are low.

Learners were asked if they applied for credit from the Department of Education for any prior learning or work experiences they have had. Only 13% of Level Three Learners said that they did this, whereas, in reality, all Level Three Learners' transcripts are considered for credit. Perhaps learners are not aware that this is a standard process.

Most learners, 91%, have set a long term goal and most have future plans for study or

training: 40% plan to attend college, 3% plan to attend Private Training School, 17% plan to go into Trade Programs, 21% are undecided, 15% plan to go to university, 1% plan to attend a vocational program, 2% have no future study or training plans and 3% have other plans that were not specified.

Learners were asked to what extent they agreed with a number of statements about the program they were enrolled in. This question was rated on a four-point scale where *strongly disagree equaled 1 and strongly agreed equaled 4*. With the exception of the question dealing with science labs, all learners *agreed* (average rating of 3) with the following statements: the learning environment was informal, they liked the science, math and language arts curriculum, the academic program meets their needs, (this question may have been misinterpreted due to the word academic), the program helps their family with their daily living, they can afford to come to the program, there are good materials to use, they are learning practical things, and what they are learning will help them get, keep, and perform better in a job. Clearly, learners *agreed* that by furthering their literacy skills and education they are more likely to have success in the job market. Science learners were asked if they had the opportunity to participate in lab experiments and demonstrations - - the average showed learners *disagreed* with this statement.

The next set of questions dealt with personal growth issues such as self-esteem, family interactions and health. Learners were asked if by taking the Literacy/ABE program certain aspects of their personal lives changed in a positive or negative way. The following scale was used: *1 Negatively, 2 No Change, or 3 Positively*. Learners stated that their problem solving skills, writing skills, and their general feeling about the future changed the most in a positive direction. Self-esteem, self-respect, ability to get a job, reading skills, knowledge of community and province, and ability to contribute to family life also changed in a positive direction although slightly less than the first three items. Learners rated speaking with other people, team work, personal health and the health of their family as items that have not changed as a result of taking the program. This is a difficult area for a person to respond.

The next set of questions dealt with the instructor and classroom setting and were rated on a four-point scale from *strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (4)*. There was little variation among students' responses. Most learners said that they *agreed to strongly agreed* that instructors are always available, help with learning plans, have useful extra learning materials, are well prepared, and respect students' opinions. A slightly lower level of agreement was expressed with the following items: instructors using real life examples and instructors using different ways of teaching. Learners said they are able to work in the classroom setting, the program has hours that suit their needs, and they feel comfortable in class.

Learners were asked to rate their physical environment on a four point scale from *1 Poor*

to 4 *Excellent*. Lighting, desks, chairs, classroom area, air quality, and accessibility were rated *Good* (3). Temperature, science lab facilities, storage for materials, space for socializing/meeting and privacy for individual work were rated between *fair* (2) and *good* (3).

Based on these findings, on average, learners *agreed* that the program they are taking is meeting their needs. There are individual site concerns/complaints that will be raised in the next section.

Individual Site Results

Sites with specific concerns are outlined below.

Charlottetown Night Program (n=65)

When learners were asked what change they would make to the program comments were grouped into three categories: more individualized instruction, availability of classes, and science labs. There were approximately 11 comments from learners who had concerns about the availability of instructors for individualized instruction; 8 comments regarding availability of classes, and three comments from learners about the availability of lab facilities.

When learners were asked for overall comments about the program the same three categories as in the first question emerged; however, there were also many positive comments regarding the merit of the courses, helpfulness of the instructors and enthusiasm of being able to participate in the courses.

Westisle Day Program (n=19)

When learners were asked about a change that would help them as learners several learners responded that there was a shortage of books. The overall comments were very positive about the instructors and program in general.

Summerside Day Program (n=50)

There were several comments about the need for more individualized instruction and the availability of updated computers and better course materials. Overall comments were very positive.

Palmer Road (n=3)

For the last couple of years there has been an issue with the space provided for learners at

the Palmer Road location. Lighting, desks/tables, classroom area, air quality, temperature, storage for materials, and privacy for individual work were rated as fair (2). In addition, all learners requested that a computer be installed for their specific use. Overall comments stated learners enjoyed the program.

Montague Day Program Level Two (n=5)

One comment each was made concerning the physical space including wanting an extra quiet area for exam writing, better lighting, area for break and lunch time outside, smaller class size and a bigger and cleaner building.

Morell Day Program (n=14)

This group of learners held their instructors in very high regard. This was evident in both the ratings and in the comments. Other comments included: more materials for labs, quiet area needed for exam writing, and better chairs. Several comments were made regarding the need for one more teacher. Note: numerous messages given over PA throughout the day is distracting to students.

Overall comments were directed to the positive attitudes and positive impact of the instructors and the positive affect the program has had on students.

Souris (n=12)

Two learners suggested one subject (either math, science, or English) per class.

Tignish (n=5)

Three learners expressed their enthusiasm for the program.

Charlottetown Day Program (n=70)

Comments fell into three categories: individualized instruction, more materials, and physical space/conditions. The issue with the physical space in this site is that there is not enough physical space for the amount of students as the rooms are not large enough. In addition, many students requested a student lounge area. Other comments were made about instructor/learner ratio and lack of resources. Overall comments were very positive toward the program and instructors.

Summerside Night Program (n=40)

The majority of comments were based in two areas: longer courses and materials to take

home. Overall comments were all very positive about instructors and the program.

Summary of Findings

Learners seem to be appreciative and overall they are satisfied with programs. Each site varies in many aspects and may have individualized requests which will be addressed in the recommendation section of this report. In the larger centres, learners request additional one-on-one support and more space. Science facilities in some cases are still lacking.

Instructors

Instructors were asked to identify goals learners have set for themselves. They stated: 8% were interested in the PEI High School Graduation Certificate, 48% were interested in GED, 14% were finishing high school credits, 29% were taking additional high school credits but had already graduated, and 3% were interested in career path goals. In total, instructors who responded to the evaluation stated they instructed 486 students, they have completed 199 learning plans and had 401 learning plans in progress. The data from the question regarding learning plans was unclear; therefore, the data is not reliable.

Instructors were asked about what type of assessment methods they use. The responses varied from informal testing such as observations and intake questions to GED practice tests, WRAT and CARA reading assessments. Instructors found that these methods were accurate for assessing incoming learners.

Instructors stated that 39% of their learners had college as a long-term goal, 2% were interested in private colleges, 4% were interested in trade programs, 12% planned on attending university, 2% vocational school and 41% were undecided. The statistics for the trade programs and the undecided population are drastically different from those stated by learners.

Instructors stated they had 15 Level One Learners and 61 Level Two Learners. Again testing and assessment procedures varied at program entry. Instructors found these procedures to be somewhat accurate. Curriculum for Level One and Level Two Learners was deemed *good* (3) by instructors.

Developing monthly learning outcomes for learners was something that most instructors were satisfied with and they found that using these as measurements for success was satisfactory.

When asked which teaching strategies and tools were used with learners, instructors responded that they used one-one-one method most often followed by peer tutoring, team

work, and demonstrations. Labs were rated as *seldom or never* used by all but one instructor. Using field trip, a.v. equipment, guest presenters, volunteer tutors and other methods were rated as *seldom or never*. This is somewhat concerning when considering the variety of learning styles in one classroom. Are instructors appealing to the visual and kinesthetic learners in an atmosphere that uses primarily an auditory approach?

Instructors responded about the physical conditions in their classroom settings. Items such as lighting, desk/tables, chairs, classroom areas, safety features, health, and accessibility were rated 3 on a four-point scale *1 equaled poor and 4 equaled excellent*. Items such as air quality, temperature, storage for materials, audio visual aids, noise distractions, privacy for individual instruction, and space for socializing and meeting were rated *fair to good* (2-3). Lab facilities were rated *poor to fair* (1-2).

Instructors were asked about additional software programs that they would find useful. Two instructors suggested Autoskills and three suggested GED programs. Other programs mentioned included lab software, Academy of Reading (Autoskills), programs for basic science and social studies, Factory Mystery and Typing Tutor.

Instructors rated the support services IACE provides: Administration services were rated as *good*, counselling services were rated as fair to good, and referrals to other services were rated as *fair to good*.

Instructors were asked to comment on any issues that falls under the jurisdiction (policy, standards and evaluation) of the Literacy Initiatives Secretariat that would improve the program for learners. There were a variety of responses to this question. Some stated less paperwork/clerical duties to allow more teaching time, class size too large in some cases, bonafide night program in Morell (no night budget as such), better understanding of GED test including resources such as a new book with the changes included and more money for resources (texts, audio visual aids and more space).

Instructors have participated in a number of professional development activities covering a wide variety of interests and skills. These included CARA workshop, Counselling Adult Learners, Life Skills Coaching, True Colors, Women's Wellness Day, GED Workshop, Assessment of Adults, Teaching Adults with Learning Disabilities, Key Math workshop, Laubach Literacy training, PLAR, curriculum training, assertiveness training and Creative Thinking in the Workplace.

Instructors were asked about other employer sponsored professional development activities they would like to attend to better prepare them as instructors. There was a variety of individual suggestions: criterion referenced testing training, skills based education training, writing (reports) training, technical writing training, any workshops on learning disabilities, Laubach Literacy training, ESL training, Part 2 of Life Skills Training, to

be able to attend Department of Education sponsored professional development days regarding English curriculum, new GED test, English curriculum, Chemistry lab delivery, computer training, individualized instruction, learners-mental illness, non-traditional evaluation procedures, a seminar on student motivation, career counselling, dealing with social problems of adult learners, attend more math workshops on the new curriculum that was implemented in the public school system and one person requested a conference in Calgary called "Writing Outloud."

Most instructors were satisfied with assessment procedures/methods; however, there were a few suggestions offered to help improve learner placements in Level One and Two. Standard reading assessment for decoding and comprehension, an assessment to help identify specific learning disabilities, different screening tests for Level One and Two and something that takes a closer look at reading levels.

Instructors were also quite satisfied with the assessment procedures they were using to reflect learners progress. Other suggestions include: skills based and critical thinking methods, standard reading assessment, testing on material covered, monthly assessments, standardized tests, some way to assess personal growth and access to high school transcripts.

Instructors were asked about one change they would like to see IACE make to help them, as an instructor, in delivering the Literacy/ABE Program. Responses fell into several categories: 1) more instructors, 2) more resources for learners, 3) less paper work, 4) designated prep time and 5) more physical space.

Conclusions

Overall, the Institute of Adult and Community Education is complies with the contractual obligations of the Department of Education; however, there are a number of areas listed in the recommendation section of this evaluation which need to be addressed. Some of these issues have been an ongoing concern for either learners or instructors for the past two years. It is time to actively address these issues as they affect the learning of many adults in the Adult and Basic Education programs at IACE.

In conclusion, it is obvious that the Literacy/Adult Basic Education Program is effective and that many gains are being made in the area of adult education through this institution. By responding to the issues identified as a result of this evaluation and earlier evaluations, the gains for the adult learners on Prince Edward Island will only increase.