

Ontario Adult Literacy Curriculum Framework

Foundations of Transition- Oriented Programming

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What is this document about?

The Foundations of Transition-Oriented Programming paper

- explains transition-oriented programming in the Ontario Adult Literacy Curriculum Framework (OALCF)
- describes how transition-oriented programming relates to the principles of goal-directed learning
- discusses the connection between transition-oriented programming and contextualized learning
- explores non-academic supports and service coordination for Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) Program learners

What is Transition-Oriented Programming?

Transition-oriented programming is a term that brings together the following key elements of the OALCF:

- goal-directed learning
- contextualized learning
- co-ordinated learner supports and services

Over the years, LBS practitioners have deepened their understanding of how goal-directed and contextualized learning can contribute to a learner's success to move within and beyond the LBS Program—to *transition* to her or his next steps of employment, broader education and training, or independence. Furthermore, practitioners have realized that adult literacy learners achieve more positive outcomes when they also receive integrated support services from their communities. In other words, learners can achieve more success if they

- commit to working towards their identified goal
- participate in contextualized programming that uses content taught in authentic and meaningful contexts
- receive integrated non-academic support services from their communities

The Ontario Adult Literacy Curriculum Framework (OALCF) provides the guidance and tools to help practitioners make informed choices about how to bring the elements of transition-oriented programming into their day-to-day operations—within the agency's organizational capacity and means.

What is Goal-Directed Learning?

Key to the concept of transition-oriented programming is goal-directed learning that uses a learner's goal, or his or her purpose for attending the LBS Program, to plan and deliver programming that supports that goal. Learner goals are fundamentally transition-oriented because they look beyond the LBS Program. An identified goal helps learners express their desire to engage in learning that will support them at work and in their homes, communities, and broader education and training.

The meaning and implementation of goal-directed programming was initially described in the 1995 publication *Goal-Directed Assessment: An Initial Assessment Process*. The key mechanism to help practitioners implement goal-directed learning was an individualized learner plan developed for each learner and used to plan learning activities, track progress, and demonstrate achievements. Although the original LBS learner plan template was not prescriptive, it used guiding categories to allow learners and practitioners to work in a participatory and collaborative way. The plan contained the following key elements:

- the learner's personal, educational, and employment background
- the long-term and short-term goals of the learner
- skills needed by the learner to reach those goals
- the learner's skill gaps and plan of action to fill those gaps and reach identified goals

Learner plans were originally intended to describe what the learners needed to know on the first day of their next step, enabling them to have a reasonable chance of success in the new situation. This emphasis on literacy learning designed to prepare learners for their next step is the essence of transition-oriented programming.

The following two supporting documents followed the publication of *Goal-Directed Assessment: An Initial Assessment Process*:

1. *Working with Learning Outcomes: A Validation Draft* (1998)
2. *Common Assessment in the Literacy and Basic Skills Program* (2000)

Together, these documents became the adult literacy curriculum and helped practitioners plan learning and assessment activities. Also described in the documents was how to report learning progress and learner achievements. Although the goal-directed assessment documents set the stage for transition-oriented programming, LBS practitioners further identified the need to capture learner progress towards specific goals that included employment, apprenticeship, secondary school credit, postsecondary, and independence.

Key features of goal-directed learning

The Ontario Adult Literacy Curriculum Framework (OALCF) supports the primary purpose of the LBS Program to help learners bridge gaps in the literacy and numeracy abilities they need for goal achievement. The OALCF also helps practitioners organize content based on how learners will apply their learning in meaningful, goal-related ways. Various tools and user guides have been created to directly address the elements of goal-directed learning within the context of transition-oriented programming. Specifically, these resources deal with the:

- five OALCF goal paths and what they lead to
- use of milestone tasks to indicate a learner's progress towards goal completion
- role of task-based learning

What are the five goal paths?

The idea of goal paths is a unique feature of program planning, assessment, and reporting activities. It is also the key feature of the OALCF's transition-oriented approach to literacy and numeracy learning.

Currently, the LBS Program uses three over-arching goal paths for program planning and reporting: employment, further education and training, and independence. To assist with reporting learner achievements more clearly and consistently, the OALCF uses the following five goal paths:

1. Employment
2. Apprenticeship
3. Secondary School Credit
4. Postsecondary
5. Independence

Described in detail by the OALCF, these five goal paths

- guide and organize a learner’s long-term and related short-term goals
- help practitioners plan appropriate learning activities
- enable programs to report goal completion and successful outcomes

OALCF developers are identifying for practitioners how to use the five goal paths to support learning and how to identify requirements that enable learners to transition to the next steps of their goal path. By exploring what a learner may encounter in their next steps, the developers will be able to provide useful information regarding the entry and admission requirements for the goal paths of apprenticeship, secondary school credit, and postsecondary, and the common entry processes and expectations for employment. Developers will identify key learner transition activities for each of these four goal paths. The unique independence goal path is being looked at differently. To describe it, researchers have referred to a wealth of practitioner and academic studies that describe literacy progress without using skill-based measures.

Practitioners will receive a synthesis of the information related to the five goal paths.

What are milestone tasks?

LBS service providers will be expected to report on learner progress towards goal achievement using tasks that are authentic and meaningful to the learner. These *milestone tasks* are in development.

Milestone tasks provide an indicator of learner progress by reflecting the content and transition requirements of the learner’s goal path and by indicating the use of skills, knowledge, and behaviours required for a learner’s next step, or transition. Throughout their LBS program, learners will use task-based learning activities in combination with literacy development activities to understand the connection between literacy skills acquisition and literacy use. In time, milestone tasks will be identified for each goal path and will be one indicator of a learner’s progress towards goal achievement.

Milestone tasks provide a common way for external stakeholders to understand what literacy programs do by using a common language for reporting learner progress. Furthermore, the ministry will be better able to understand the impact of LBS programming. OALCF developers will provide practitioners with related assessment guidance to help them choose, assess, and record milestone tasks to indicate learner progress.

What is task-based learning?

The OALCF uses task-based competency standards to position program learning and assessment activities in one of three levels of literacy learner proficiency. The levels span a wide range of literacy abilities—as do learners in LBS programs—from initial stages of literacy learning to advanced stages, indicating readiness for postsecondary education. The criteria that distinguish the levels are tasks, not discrete skills. The use of tasks to demonstrate literacy development directly supports *contextualized* programming, programming framed around meaningful and authentic situations in which learners apply knowledge, skills, and behaviours to perform

integrated tasks. Representing how literacy is used beyond the program, integrated tasks are authentic to a learner's goal path and can integrate one or more competency task groups. For example, a sample integrated task for a learner's independence goal might be to have a learner use a transportation schedule listed on a website to find out the cost and travel times for a weekend trip to another city.

By using task-based competency standards, practitioners can measure learning and assessment activities more holistically, enabling them to look at literacy learning progress more broadly. They can now rely on task complexity and learner performance to assess progress, rather than simply the achievement of discrete literacy or numeracy skills.

OALCF developers have developed a comprehensive template of sample tasks to support both learning and assessment activities.

What is Contextualized Learning?

Within the LBS Program, transition-oriented programming is *contextualized* programming that provides the context for the development of literacy learning activities and their underpinning competencies. Contextualized learning means that learners use learning materials as they would use them outside the LBS Program. This practice allows learners to clearly understand how their learning in programs connects to their goals. It also supports practitioners in planning learning activities that match, as closely as possible, literacy uses and applications in the five goal paths. In this way, learners are engaged in *authentic* learning activities. For example, the kinds of activities that support learning for a learner who has chosen the goal path of independence will look very different from the learning activities that support learning for a learner whose goal is to enter an apprenticeship program.

From a learner's perspective, a contextualized approach leads to increased uses of literacy outside the program. The more programs use authentic materials, the greater the increase in authentic uses of literacy (Purcell-Gates, Degener, Jacobson & Soler, 2002). Related to the active use of literacy are the positive changes that learners experience on a personal and social level (Bingman & Ebert, 2000; Lefebvre, et. al., 2006), including a change in self-confidence and identity. This supports the idea that adults seek to develop literacy skills in order to "change what they can do, how they are perceived, and how they perceive themselves in specific social and cultural contexts" (Stein, 1995, p. 10).

When contextualized literacy practices are used to measure learner outcomes, these practices are able to demonstrate the impact of a learner's participation in a program (Beder, 1999; Purcell-Gates, et al., 2002; Reder, 2008; Sheehan-Holt & Smith, 2000). Conversely, when only literacy skills are measured, they are not able to demonstrate literacy development on their own (Beder, 1999; Brooks, Davies, Duckett, Hutchison, Kendall, Wilkin, 2000; Reder, 2009; Sheehan-Holt & Smith, 2000).

Finally, a contextualized approach facilitates a broader understanding of literacy that addresses the linguistic and cultural concerns of adult literacy learners, including their need for

- a cultural approach to literacy that takes into account belief systems, attitudes, values, a sense of identity, a sense of belonging to a particular community, and an understanding of a learner's place in the world
- cross-cultural sensitivity to help boost their self esteem and pride in their cultural identity

What are the roles of learner supports and service coordination?

The success of learners in acquiring the necessary skills, knowledge, and behaviours to meet their goals results not only from participating in literacy programming, but also from resolving needs that often require additional support. Learners who have access to a range of both academic and non-academic supports more often persist and succeed in their learning.

LBS service providers have historically served a wide range of literacy learners requiring additional supports. For example, some learners may have physical or mental health challenges, making it impossible for them to continue “regular” schooling. Others may be living in poverty and have to face the practical demands of work, making participation in programming difficult. Some learners may have been involved in crime or addiction, making it difficult to consider a direct career path for which education plays a large part. Finally, disruptions in employment due to a workplace accident or closure may dramatically change the circumstance of a learner. Some learners will come to the LBS Program with a network of supports; others with none.

The primary mandate of LBS service providers is not only to deliver literacy programming, but also to link or refer learners to service providers with a mandate and expertise to provide non-academic supports. As a result, literacy service providers have had to work closely with a range of employment, health, and social services providers to make effective referrals. Through the OALCF, literacy practitioners will now have clearer guidance on how to maximize success through effective learner support and service coordination.

Five types of learner supports

Literacy learners experience many barriers to program participation and success. According to the resources available in an agency, LBS staff informally evaluate the supports needed by learners, particularly those supports that are not related to a learner’s LBS programming. LBS agency staff then refer learners to the appropriate agency for further evaluation. Generally, these supports can be organized according to the following five types:

- financial aid and material supports
- health supports
- academic supports
- employment-related supports
- other social services

1. FINANCIAL AND MATERIAL SUPPORTS are of major, practical importance for many learners. LBS learners often demonstrate financial need and may be eligible for funding to defray the costs of childcare and transportation, either of which can be a significant barrier to program participation. Other challenges to participation may include the need for housing and income support.

2. HEALTH SUPPORTS are also often required by literacy learners. While the extent of such challenges is not well documented, the proportion of literacy learners with health needs, including mental and physical health needs, is thought to be significant, particularly for learners identified as “harder to serve.” Health challenges are particularly evident for low-income learners and the chronically unemployed. Providing services for learners who need counseling and, in some cases, more intense mental health supports, is a major challenge in many communities.

3. ACADEMIC SUPPORTS, including academic counseling, is another important type of support often required by literacy learners. Academic supports may include additional tutoring, supports for learners with learning disabilities, and various other supports, such as academic or language assessments and translations of academic documents.

4. EMPLOYMENT-RELATED SUPPORTS include career guidance and counseling, as well as job search, job coaching, and other employment services. Career counselors, in particular, can help literacy learners clarify their expectations and convey important information about career paths and the necessary conditions for attaining different credentials. Given the importance of employment goals in Ontario, employment-related supports are crucial, not only to literacy learners with employment goals, but also to those learners whose career goals will take them through secondary school credit, postsecondary, or apprenticeship programs.

5. OTHER SOCIAL SERVICES, including personal and group counseling, may be a prerequisite for, or an important component of, the motivation that learners require to participate in literacy programs.

OALCF tools to help practitioners identify learner supports

OALCF developers will provide practitioners with a needs assessment tool to help them identify supports learners may require. This tool will help practitioners develop appropriate referrals, design the learner's learner plan, and identify the learner's preferred mode of LBS delivery. A common template for learner plans will also be available to help agencies document program elements.

Service coordination and integrated programming to provide learner supports

Research reveals that “the more ‘wrap-around’ services [that literacy programs] can provide their learners, the better educational results they will achieve” (Liebowitz et al, 2003, p. 13). To make supports available, LBS service providers need to coordinate services with other service providers, as LBS-funded agencies cannot, by themselves, meet the range of needs and challenges that literacy learners bring to their programs. LBS funded agencies currently work and connect with community partners in many different ways. With Employment Ontario's increased focus on client outcomes and integrated services, there are many willing partners to continue to improve the effectiveness of service coordination. Four ways to approach service coordination and integrated programming are

- interagency cooperation
- integrated programming
- community-wide planning
- active case management

1. INTERAGENCY COOPERATION occurs when agencies are able to cooperate to ensure that learner supports are in place. For example, an independent agency might agree to provide all the assessment services in a community and track the effectiveness of referrals. Or, an LBS service provider might develop a common screening tool for all agencies to use. Practitioners have also facilitated interagency cooperation by informally “negotiating” with agencies in their communities, based on the practitioners' personal relationships with those agencies.

2. INTEGRATED PROGRAMMING occurs when employment and training services are provided concurrently, ideally through a single service provider or partnership. For example, a learner might be accessing a job

placement through an employment skills centre where she or he can also participate in work-related literacy and numeracy instruction provided by an LBS service provider. A recent overview of transition-oriented programming in the United States notes the value of efforts that combine instruction in contextualized skills, workforce training, and other support services to help adults improve their basic skills (MPR Associates, 2010).

3. A COMMUNITY-WIDE PLANNING PROCESS occurs when community service providers cooperate to ensure that their services meet the non-academic supports required by LBS learners in the entire community. For example, LBS service providers currently participate in a literacy services planning process to ensure that literacy programs meet needs unique to a community. This process could be broadened to include service providers who might also provide financial and material, health, academic, and employment-related supports, and other social services.

4. ACTIVE CASE MANAGEMENT occurs when information about a learner's academic and non-academic needs is managed centrally to ensure that the learner's needs are met. Active case management can strengthen a program's capacity to assess learner barriers and provide referrals or direct services more efficiently. Employment service providers under Employment Ontario currently use this approach to service coordination. In time, an important tool that LBS service providers will be able to use for active case management is the ministry's EOIS/CaMS. This system will track the needs, programs, supports, attainments, and outcomes of literacy learners. Having a mechanism to both track and analyze learner progress enables practitioners to determine where to focus program improvement strategies more effectively (National Center on Education and the Economy 2009; and Duke and Strawn 2010).

Common to all four approaches to service coordination and integrated programming is an important question: *"What are the range and the intensity of supports that different learners require?"* Answering this question is critical before deciding on which approaches will, over time, best address the support services a learner may require. As well, literacy practitioners in Ontario have suggested that different communities may require different approaches, based on the services and resources available, and the history and development of relationships among different service providers including, but not limited to, LBS-funded agencies.

OALCF tools to identify learner supports and facilitate service coordination

To help literacy service providers in Ontario provide more effective learner supports, integrated programming, and service coordination, the ministry will provide tools to describe learner supports and service coordination that involves LBS-funded agencies and other providers. Furthermore, practitioners will also receive

- a learner support needs assessment tool – or *decision tree* with questions to guide them in identifying what supports may be needed and where learners might access them
- a learner plan template to help them develop their own plans for providing the required program elements and accessing learner supports

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