



*Deaf Literacy
Initiative*

Assessment in Deaf Adult Literacy: A National Study

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Funded by:



Human Resources and
Skills Development Canada

Ressources humaines et
Développement des compétences Canada

Acknowledgements

Deaf Literacy Initiative, thank you for allowing me to lead such an important project. I am humbled with the knowledge and wisdom which was shared in this journey.

The project is a collection of the voices of educators and leaders in Deaf Adult Literacy. Together these voices build a pathway for language and literacy learning opportunities for Deaf and hard of hearing adult learners.

Thank you to the Deaf Literacy Initiative team.

Peggy Anne Gordon, your leadership and vision was felt throughout the project.

Jennifer Best, your heart and passion gave the project so much energy.

A special thanks to my mentors whom have become dear friends. It is your love for literacy and languages that inspired me in this project.

Dr. Debra Russell

Dr. Sarah Elaine Eaton

Dr. David Jardine

Dr. Gail Jardine-McNichol

Leonor Vlug

Dr. Dave Mason

I want to thank all who

- shared their resources and expertise freely

- took the time to schedule interviews
- advised on the project – The Advisory Committee (PAC)

Thank you to the students. Without you, we wouldn't be able to see the world through so many different perspectives. Because of what you shared, we remain forever committed to you.

Thank you, Office of Literacy and Essential Skills for funding this project.

Sincerely,

Brent David Novodvorski

Publication Information

Title Assessment in Deaf Adult Literacy: A National Project

Date March 2011

Author Brent David Novodvorski

Chief Editor Jennifer Best

Clear Writing Editor Leah Morris

This report is published by Deaf Literacy Initiative in collaboration with Office of Essential Skills; it is a division of Human Resources and Development Canada.

APA Citation

Novodvorski, B.D. (2011). **Assessment in Deaf Adult Literacy: A National Study.**

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Executive Summary

This research report contains the findings about Canadian Deaf Adult Literacy Programs. The project began on October 2010 and ended on March 2011.

The following activities were completed.

1. Reviewed literature and reports to guide and design the research methodology and methods.

Literatures about Deaf Adult Education and Assessment Practices of Adult Learners as well as reports about CAMERA were used to guide and design the research methodology and choice of methods. Qualitative methodology was used. Information was gathered through

- a. questionnaires
- b. interviews
- c. focus group

2. Compiled a List of Assessment Tools of Participating Deaf Adult Literacy Programs

American Sign Language (ASL) assessment tools and English Assessment tools used when a learners enters, attends and exits a Deaf Literacy Programs were collected. The report found that programs involved in this research lacked a standardized ASL assessment tool. Three categories of English assessments were established and listed including

- Psych-educational tools
- informal tools

- commercial tools

3. Collected Data from Participating Deaf Adult Literacy Programs

The research provided a snapshot of the 16 participating Deaf Adult Literacy Programs (DALP). The research looked at the

- profile of the research participants
- type of delivery agency
- learning goals of students
- curriculum within each DALP

16 programs participated

- 8 were community based programs
- 7 were college based programs
- 1 program was funded by a school board.

There were 27 participants

- 16 Deaf
- 11 hearing

The participants worked in various positions such as

- Program Coordinators
- Literacy Practitioners
- Student Support Workers

Participants identified learner's reasons for entering Deaf Adult Literacy Programs (DALP). The 3 most common reasons were

- American Sign Language (ASL) and English language learning
- independence goals
- employment goals

4. Analyzed Assessment Practices in Deaf Adult Literacy Programs (DALP)

Participants shared information about the assessment tools used and the limitations.

Some of the limitations of ASL assessment tools include that they

- aren't guided by ASL linguistics
- aren't standardized
- lack valid measurement systems.
- don't work well with Deaf learners who use Signed Exact English (SEE) or Pigeon Sign Language (PSE)

Some of the limitations of English assessment include that they

- aren't designed for Deaf Adults
- must be adapted to make the tool accessible
- haven't been assessed after being adapted to see if the results remain valid

Participants also reported on assessment practices used in their programs upon

- entry to a Deaf Adult Literacy program (DALP)
- ensuring attendance of a DALP
- exit of a DALP

The research showed that Deaf-stream CAMERA is the only assessment tool that has been designed for Deaf Adults. As of this report, Deaf-stream CAMERA is still in the final stages of development and isn't available DALPs. Participating DALPs stated that they are interested in working with Deaf Literacy Initiative (DLI) to pilot CAMERA.

5. Compiled a list of Recommended Best Practices for Assessment

Participants were asked what worked well in assessing Deaf Adult Learners. Three main areas were identified

- assessor
- assessment process
- assessment tools

In total 12 best practices were identified.

6. Compiled a list of the top 3 'wishes' reported by DAL programs (DALPs)

The top 3 'wishes' reported by participating DALPs are

1. American Sign Language (ASL) Assessment Tools
2. ASL curriculum

3. Assessment tools designed for the Deaf learner

Based on the research findings it was suggested that more work needs to be done to

- develop successive ASL levels for Deaf Adults
- develop standardized ASL assessment tool
- develop ASL curriculum
- develop a National Deaf Adult Literacy Organization
- develop assessment tools that are developed specifically for a Deaf learner
- research about Psycho-educational Assessment tools for Deaf Adults

This research was presented to the PAC members on March 5th, 2011. The PAC members made two recommendations.

- National Deaf Adult Literacy Organization should be a non-governmental organization
- Research and Development should be the foundation of the National Deaf Adult Literacy Organization to support collaborative activities in curriculum development, assessment, resources development and literacy practitioner professional development and training

Project Background

The need for this project came from another project of the Deaf Literacy Initiative (DLI). DLI is currently adapting and testing an employment based literacy assessment tool called CAMERA – **C**ommunications **a**nd **M**ath **E**mployment **R**eadiness **A**ssessment. It has been adapted to meet the language and cultural needs of the Deaf community.

When CAMERA is ready, DLI wants to share it with Deaf Adult Literacy programs (DALPs) outside of Ontario. As a first step, DLI did this research project to gather a better understanding of DALPs outside of Ontario. Very little is known about Canadian DALPs.

This report is divided into the following sections

- Research Design

- Data Collected about Participating DALPs

- Data Analysis of Assessment Practices in DALPs

- Recommended Best Practices in Assessments

- DAL 'Wish List'

- Interest in CAMERA

- Recommendations

- Conclusion

Research Design

Deaf Literacy Initiative (DLI) developed a directory of DALPs across Canada. This directory has contact information from these programs. A total of 22 Deaf literacy programs across Canada were identified. During the research portion of this project, 1 additional program was discovered.

An invitation was sent out to all 23 programs. 16 programs responded - a 70% response rate.

Limitations of the Study

Not every Deaf Adult Literacy program (DALP) participated in the research. Therefore the research is a snapshot of DALPs across Canada.

This study records individual views and doesn't represent their delivery agency or co-workers views.

Registered Psychologists weren't involved in this study.

Methodology

This research project mainly used a qualitative approach. All programs were invited to participate in the research process through a questionnaire or an interview. The choice was provided so programs could participate to their comfort level and availability.

The questionnaire was made available in English and French

The interviews were made available in spoken English, via a telephone interview, or American Sign Language (ASL), via webcam interview.

DLI was prepared to make arrangements for Langue Signes Quebec (LSQ) users who may have wished to participate, however no such requests were made.

The spoken interviews were conducted by a hearing research assistant. The ASL interviews were conducted by the researcher. All interviews, whether spoken English or in ASL, were recorded and transcribed into written English.

At times the researcher would follow up with participants after interviews to clarify answers given or to ask follow up questions.

To see the interview questions in

- **English, please see Appendix C**
- **French, please see Appendix D**

A focus group was held during a Project Advisory Committee (PAC) meeting in September 2010. The PAC is made up of Deaf community members from across Canada with expertise in Deaf Adult literacy. The focus group was conducted in ASL. The meeting was videotaped and transcribed into English.

To see the questions asked during the focus group, please see Appendix E.

In addition to qualitative research, a review was made of existing resources and reports about literacy best practices, literacy and the Deaf Adult learner, assessment tool and practices, and reports specifically about CAMERA.

Data Collected

This research project seeks to paint a picture of Canadian Deaf Adult Literacy programs (DALPs). Specifically the research looked at the

- profile of participants in this research
- type of DALP
- learning goals
- curriculum

Profile of Research Participants

An invitation was sent out to all 23 Deaf Adult Literacy programs (DALP) across Canada. Sixteen programs responded. From those 16 programs, 27 people participated.

The participant data collected included

- deaf or hearing
- method of response
- job position
- years of experience

Participant: Deaf or Hearing

- 16 identified themselves as Deaf
- 11 identified themselves as hearing

Participant: Method of Response

- 8 people responded using the questionnaire¹
- 8 people responded through ASL interviews²
- 7 people responded through a telephone interview
- 6 people were involved in the focus group

Two participants were involved in both the American Sign Language (ASL) interviews and in the focus group.

Participant: Job Position

Participants worked in various positions. Some work inside classrooms and others, outside. All participants were involved in assessments. For this research categories were created to classify the positions represented by participants. The categories are

- Program coordinators
- Literacy practitioners
- Dual role: program coordinator and literacy practitioners
- Student Support Worker
- Employment workers

Program coordinators included the following positions

- Department Head

¹ 3 participants chose to respond together

² 2 participants choose to be interviewed together

- Literacy Coordinators
- Executive Directors

Literacy Practitioners include

- Teachers
- Educators
- Instructors

Dual role refers to individuals working both as a program coordinator and a literacy practitioner.

Student Support workers include

- Specialized Support Advisor
- Student Support Specialist
- Vocational Counsellor

Specialized Support Advisor and Student Support Specialist have similar roles. As part of their work, they meet with Deaf learners to determine the type of supports they need for access to and success in learning. Learners may be given resources that support their education and communication. These resources might include sign language interpreters or tutorials. Another role of student support workers is to make referrals to the assessment team to learn the language background of their Deaf clients before deciding the supports needed.

Vocational counsellors

- intake clients
- look for barriers to employment
- make program recommendations

Employment workers participated in the research as well. While they don't do classroom based instruction, they do give employment literacy related supports such as writing a resume and job search skills.

Table 1 shows the breakdown of the job positions held by the participants of this research project.

Job Position	Number of Participants
Program Coordinator	8
Literacy Practitioner	9
Dual Role	5
Student Support Worker	3
Employment Worker	2
	N= 27

Participants: Years of experience

Table 2 shows the research participants' years of experience

Years of Experience	*Number of Participants
0-4	4
5-9	6
10-14	5
15-19	3
More than 20	4
*5 people did not respond to this question	N= 22

Types of Deaf Adult Literacy Delivery Agencies

Deaf Adult Literacy delivery agencies in this study are organizations that provide literacy training to Deaf Adults. Three types of delivery agencies were identified through the research

- community
- college
- school board

Of the 16 delivery agencies that participated

- 8 were community
- 7 were college
- 1 was funded by a school board



Table 3 shows some of the characteristics of the delivery agencies.

Provinces	Type of Delivery Agency ³	Full-Time	Part-time	Number of Students	
				Deaf	Deaf-Blind ⁴
British Columbia	College	√	√	67	5
Alberta I	College		√	12	
Alberta II	College	√	√	6	
Saskatchewan	College	√		6	
Manitoba 1	College	√	√	39	1
Manitoba 2	Community		√	9	
Ontario I	Community	√		18	
Ontario II	Community	√		31	
Ontario III	Community	√		10	
Ontario IV	Community	√	√	24	2
Ontario V	Community	√		20	
Ontario VI	College	√	√	35	2
Ontario VII	School Board	√	√	22	
Ontario VIII	Community	√	√	35	
New Brunswick	Community	√	√	8	
Nova Scotia	College		√	11	

Some programs chose not to participate in the research. Not all provinces and territories have Deaf Adult Literacy Programs (DALPs). No data was collected from the following provinces and territories.

³ Some delivery agencies only offer mainstream education.

⁴ Some delivery agencies reported that some learners have low vision but are not officially diagnosed as Deaf-Blind. Only those formally diagnosed as Deaf-blind are listed.

Quebec

Prince Edward Island

Newfoundland

Yukon

Northwest Territories

Nunavut

Learning Goals

Learners have various reasons and goals when entering a literacy program. Three of the most common reasons are

- ASL and English Language Learning
- Independence skills
- Employment



Table 4 shows learning goals reported by the programs that participated in the research.

Provinces	Learning Goals			
	Independence Skills	Employment	ASL	English
British Columbia	√	√	√	√
Alberta I	√	√		√
Alberta II	√	√	√	√
Saskatchewan	√	√		√
Manitoba 1			√	√
Manitoba 2			√	√
Ontario I	√	√	√	√
Ontario II			√	√
Ontario III		√	√	√
Ontario IV	√	√	√	√
Ontario V	√	√	√	
Ontario VI	√	√	√	√
Ontario VII	√	√	√	√
Ontario VIII	√	√	√	√
New Brunswick	√	√	√	√
Nova Scotia		√	√	√

Curriculum

The analysis of the data looked at the following sections⁵:

Type of Curriculum

Essential Skills and/or Canadian Language Benchmarks as a Guide in Curriculums

⁵ Three programs did not respond to this section.

Types of Curriculum

Curriculums are learning plans⁶. The research showed 2 types of curriculums

- adapted formal curriculums
- individualized curriculum

Curriculum: Adapted Formal Curriculum

A formal curriculum is the planned series offered by a delivery agency⁷ that include

- objectives
- content
- learning experiences

Some formal curriculums are created by the government. Data showed that of the 16 programs, 4 programs used an adapted version of a formal curriculum.

Curriculum: Limitations of Adapted Curriculum

The 4 programs reported there are limitations when using formal curriculum. They stated that the curriculum

- focuses on English Literacy

⁶ Oliva, P. (1997) The curriculum: Theoretical dimensions. New York: Longman.

⁷ http://www.unesco.org/education/tlsf/TLSF/theme_a/mod05/uncom05t01s01.htm

- is designed for Hearing Adult Learners
- doesn't include ASL

A Program Coordinator stated

“We do not fully implement the curriculum given to us by the province...as it is not Deaf friendly and does not necessarily address all of our issues”

As a result, the 4 programs reported that they adapted the formal curriculum and it ended up different than the original.

A literacy practitioner shared

“We follow the local agencies' curriculum but it's too complicated for Deaf learners. I've gone through it page-by-page and end up creating my own.”

A program coordinator talked about the barrier with the lack of Deaf Adult literacy curriculum.

“...there is no Deaf curriculum whatsoever. We're tired of always having to make modifications, deciphering the meaning, trying to find interpretations...it wastes students' precious time...these modifications end up not being what we think; it becomes irrelevant and the government becomes disgruntled with us. During frequent program visits, they come and see us as 'stupid' in their eyes when we really know what we're doing...”

Curriculum: Individualized Curriculum

Nine programs developed a curriculum based on individual literacy goals. Some of the characteristics of this type of curriculum reported by the 9 programs are

“The students will tell the instructor what they want to learn and what they want to focus on.”

“Kind of develop the curriculum as we need for each student”

“Really, it depends on the learner and what they want. We’ve taught WHMIS⁸ [Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System] and Driver’s Ed.”

Curriculum: Using Canadian Language Benchmarks and Essential Skills

Participants were asked the following question.

Does your program use Canadian Language Benchmarks (CLB) and/or Canada’s Essential Skills (ES) as a guide for curriculum contents and classroom activities and choice of resources?

⁸ <http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/ewh-semt/occup-travail/whmis-simdut/index-eng.php>

Of the 16 programs asked

- 31% used both CLB and ES
- 25% do not use CLB and ES
- 38% only uses ES
- 6% only uses CLB

Legend

√ - Yes

X - No

Table 5 shows the use of CLB and ES within the programs that participated in

Provinces	CLB	ES
British Columbia	√	√
Alberta I	√	X
Alberta II	√	√
Saskatchewan	X	X
Manitoba 1	X	X
Manitoba 2	X	X
Ontario I	X	√
Ontario II	X	√
Ontario III	√	√
Ontario IV	√	√
Ontario V	X	X
Ontario VI	√	√
Ontario VII	X	√
Ontario VIII	X	√
New Brunswick	X	√
Nova Scotia	X	√

Data Analysis of Assessment Practices in Deaf Adult Literacy Programs (DALPs)

The research analyzed the data in the following areas

- assessment Practices
- DALP 'Wish List'
- CAMERA – Interest from DALPs

Assessment Practices

This section looks at the following topics.

What is literacy assessment?

Assessment Tools in use in DAL programs

Limitation of Assessment Tools used in DAL programs

Assessment Practices used in DAL programs

Literacy Assessment

Literacy assessment

- gathers evidence of what a student can do
- provides feedback on a student's learning to encourage further development⁹

Adult educators use a variety of assessments that are guided by the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values about language and literacy.

Assessment Tools used in Deaf Adult Literacy Programs (DALPs)

There were two types of assessment tools used in DALPs

- ASL assessment tools

⁹ Badger, E. (1992). More than Testing. *Arithmetic Teacher*, 39(9), 7-11.

- English literacy assessment tools

American Sign Language (ASL) Assessment Tools

While ASL assessment tools are used in some DALPs, they aren't available in most delivery agencies. The data showed

- 11 programs don't have an ASL assessment tool
- 4 programs have an informal ASL assessment tool
- 1 program didn't reply

Informal ASL assessment tools were created from the teacher's knowledge and skill in ASL.

One participant summarized the lack of availability of ASL assessment tools in Deaf Adult Literacy.

"...there are no assessment tools. We're short on what we have available. We make do with what's available. Really we should move on and focus on creating a new assessment."

Table 6 summarizes all ASL Assessment Tools used by programs, as reported by the participants.

Ottawa Deaf Center (CRCHI)
Impact ASL Checklist
CHS ASL Initial Assessment
Instructor and Informally Created ASL Assessment Tools
Modified Signed Communication Proficiency Interviews (SCPI)
Working with Learning Outcomes: Communications American Sign Language Learning Outcomes (GOLD)

English Literacy Assessment Tools

Table 7 listed the English Assessment Tools reported by the participants.

Psycho-educational Tools	Informal Tools	Commercial Tools
Wishler's Individual Achievement Test	In House English Assessment	Stanford Reading Diagnostic Test
Woodcock Johnson	Modified Canadian Language Benchmarks Assessment	Canadian Adult Reading Achievement
Wide Range Achievement Test	ESL Entrance Exams	Canadian Achievement Test
	K-12 English Test	Test of Adult at Basic Education
		Classroom Reading Inventory
		Test of Adult and Adolescent Language
		CAMERA (Anglophone Stream)
		The Revised Common Writing Assessment
		Canadian Adult Achievement Test
		Common Assessment of Basic Skills

Limitations of Assessment Tools used in DAL programs

This next section examines the limitation reported by the participants about the assessment tools used in their programs. This section looks at

Training on how to properly use assessment tools

American Sign Language (ASL) Assessment tools

English literacy Assessment tools

Limitation #1: Training

Participants were asked if they received training on any of the assessment tools they used. Out of 24 replies, 16 did not receive training.

1 participant, despite not receiving training, has been directed by the government to use a specific assessment tool. The participant said

“As a provincial funded agency, we have no choice but to follow what they tell us to do, using their...whatever assessment tools they have. We don’t provide any training. None at all; everyone is responsible for doing this themselves.”

Some participants reported that they don’t feel skilled in assessing adults because they didn’t received training. A Program Coordinator said

“...Unfortunately a high percentage of teachers in our program don’t have that skill. It’s always just good enough

or on the fly which isn't appropriate because...[government] becomes frustrated with us, but it's their problem."

All participants would like to receive training in a variety of assessment tools, especially American Sign Language (ASL) assessment tools. Others would like to receive training as long as the tools are appropriate for Deaf and hard of hearing adult learners. One participant said

"I'd like training for some of my staff on how to use the tools. I'd like them to be trained fully to, maybe, even become assessors, not only to be able to assess our learners but learners at other programs as well."

Limitation #2: ASL Assessment tools

Several limitations about the ASL Assessment tools in use by programs were reported. ASL tools

- aren't always guided by ASL linguistics
- aren't standardized
- lack valid measurement systems.
- don't work well with Deaf learners who use Signed Exact English (SEE) or Pigeon Sign Language (PSE)

Signed Exact English (SEE) uses invented manual codes for English. A code refers to an invented means of representing a language.¹⁰

Pidgin Sign English (PSE) includes elements of both American Sign Language (ASL) and English¹¹.

¹⁰ Baker-Shenk, C. and Cokely, D. (1980). *American Sign Language: A Teacher's Resource Text on Grammar and Culture*. Silver Spring, Md.: T.J. Publishers.

Limitation #3: English Literacy Assessment Tools

Some of the limitations of English assessment include that they

- aren't designed for Deaf Adults
- must be adapted to make the tool accessible
- haven't been assessed after being adapted to see if the results remain valid

Deaf Adult Literacy Assessment Practices

This next section examines literacy assessment practices used by the Deaf Adult Literacy Programs (DALP) when a learner

- enters a DALP
- attends a DALP
- exits a DALP

Deaf Adult Literacy Program (DALP) Assessment Practices: Entry

The participants reported that assessment is used upon entry to a DALP to

- find out existing language and literacy backgrounds
- place learners in the appropriate literacy level
- find out literacy and employment goals

¹¹ Woodward (1973). *Some Characteristics of Pidgin Sign English*. *Sign Language Studies*, 3, 39-46.

DALP Assessment Practices: During

The participants indicated informal assessments such as authentic assessments are the most common tools used to guide the learning experience. These assessments are informal measures of what students have learned and how much they have progressed. They require applying knowledge and skills in specific contexts that reflect literacy and numeracy practice abilities in the home, work, community and school¹².

The majority of these tools are teacher-created and customized to the learner. Some of these tools are agency specific, common to literacy practitioners in the organization. This ensures the assessment is used in the same way from classroom to classroom and level to level.

Checklists and Portfolios were common approaches in authentic assessments.

Common Approach in Authentic Assessment #1: Checklists

76% of the programs used checklists. The participants reported that they

- are quick and easy to use
- track tasks
- identify areas of need

¹² Campbell, Pat (2006). *Student Assessment in Adult Basic Education: A Canadian Snapshot*.

- guide a literacy practitioner's search for available resources

Most of the checklists are created by the literacy practitioner and are curriculum and content specific. This makes each one unique.

Not all of the participants liked the use of checklists. Some participants reported that a program may offer 2 classes of the same level, for which there are 2 separate checklists. This results in measurements that aren't consistent.

Common Approach in Authentic Assessment #2: Portfolios

38% of programs used portfolios. Portfolios documents learning.¹³

The reported benefits of portfolios are that they

- include learners' work to date
- show what has been learned and what will be learned
- help literacy practitioners identify areas of growth and need
- are easy to document and file
- show a learner's accomplishments
- list short and long terms goals together

Authentic assessment results are shared in support of learner success. Student support workers work outside of the classroom and aren't part of a learner assessment. Even though they don't work in classrooms, they often get reports from teachers in order to

- stay current with learner achievement
- be aware of learner challenges that continue to exist
- provide available resources

¹³ <http://www.nald.ca/library/learning/cbln/dsuccess/dsuccess.pdf>

An example of the practice of sharing assessment results can be seen at one of the college's that participated in the research. Deaf learners at this college have an Individualized Education Plan (IEP). Reports from the teacher help the Student Support worker make changes to the IEP so the learner can get the supports they need to succeed. Example of supports may be increased tutorial time or longer exam times.

Participants reported that sharing and communicating assessment results is important. It leads to a team orientated approach to learner success.

Deaf Adult Literacy Program (DALP) Assessment Practices: Exit

Assessments in this phase are a collection of skill demonstrations throughout the learner's education. Various participants shared their views on the important role assessment has at this phase.

"The exit assessment comes from the learners, not us; they show us that they have the skills and are ready to move on."

"We use is demonstration which is a cumulative activity. So, we see how well they did on the demonstration and ah...if completed that then they're ready to go on to the next step."

"Student will indicate when they are ready to move on."

The data showed that assessment tools used at this phase is strongly tied to the following factors

- available literacy levels and courses
- employment

- the learner is ready for work
- the learner found a job
- feedback by the learner

Three programs reported they don't assess learners upon exit from their program.

Assessment: Recommended Best Practices

A best practice is a technique, method or process which through experience and research has proven to lead to reliable and desired result¹⁴.

During the research, participants were asked to identify what worked well when assessing their Deaf learners. Analysis of the data discussed 3 areas of best practices

Assessor

Assessment process

Assessment tools

Best Practices - Assessor: Knowledge and Background in Literacy

Knowledge of English literacy levels and how they differ from one level to the next are important when assessing existing literacy levels. Knowledge of English Literacy levels helps the assessor to establish a starting point in the learning plan that isn't too easy or too advanced.

¹⁴ <http://searchsoftwarequality.techtarget.com/definition/best-practice>

Best Practices - Assessor: Knowledge and Skill with American Sign Language (ASL) and English

The assessor should be skilled in both languages – ASL and English. Participants reported that this bilingual skill was the most important skill helping assessors to

- capture the overall skill of the Deaf person
- determine and understand the learner's goals
- find out what boosts learners' self-confidence
- use ASL registers effectively

Best Practices - Assessor: Knowledge of Deaf Culture

An assessor with knowledge of Deaf culture is important. It recognizes that Deaf people are part of a distinct language and cultural community. This helps the assessor be more sensitive and considerate when working with the learner.

Best Practices - Assessor: Knowledge with Various Assessment Tools

Participants shared that knowing various assessment products is important. It helps to determine whether the tool is appropriate for the learner and whether the tool is valid for the learner's goals.

Best Practices - Assessor: Educational Background

Participants felt assessors should have a certain level of education such as a

Bachelor of Education with a specialization in Deaf and hard of hearing populations and

Degree in Adult Education.

The participants believed that this level of education would provide the assessor with a stronger knowledge base rather than learning about Deaf learners through a trial and error approach.

Best Practices - Assessment Process: Positive and Safe Environment

The creation of a positive and safe assessment environment was repeatedly emphasised by the participants in the research. A literacy coordinator said

“...make it non-threatening...that people don’t feel stupid about...if you’re assessing them...it becomes something that’s enjoyable to do rather than ‘Oh my god I don’t know how to answer to this’...”

Best Practices - Assessment Process: Tracking Learner Progress

Tracking progress was the most common measurement towards a literacy goal. It is an on-going activity. In this activity, the learner and teacher establish short term goals demonstrating the different tasks needed to reach the long term goal. Some participants reported that it gave learners a sense of ownership of their education.

Best Practices - Assessment Process: Sharing Results with the Learner

Participants shared the importance of including the learner in the assessment process. All 16 programs in this study share their assessment results with the learners.

“It is imperative that the learner have their own copy of the [assessment result]. It makes it much easier for them to see how it can be difficult for us with all the government-dictated aspects of our program”

Best Practices – Assessment Process: Documenting Achievement and Struggles

Participants reported that on-going documentation of achievement and struggles is critical. One literacy practitioner said

“We tend to do a great deal of observations and document them and then we sit down with the learners and show them their progress and their improvements, talk about what they’re working on, their strengths and weaknesses”.

Best Practices – Assessment Tools: Highly visual and use clear language

Visuals and clear language were the 2 common concepts which emerged across the data as important qualities of the assessment product. Assessments products should reflect the following qualities.

Common Keywords #1

Make it

- visually clean
- not cluttered
- visually based – more visuals, very visual
- easy on the eyes

Common Keywords #2

Use

- clear or plain language
- easy to follow instructions
- accessible language
- use friendly English

Literacy practitioners shared that the assessment results should be easy to understand and help to guide

- lesson plan development
- curriculum sequencing
- classroom activities

Practitioners don't like having to work through jargon or spend large amounts of time trying to interpret the results.

Best Practices – Assessment Tools: Curriculum and Content Appropriate

The data showed that the assessment tool should reflect and connect to the world learners live in. The data also showed that the assessment should reflect what learners need to know from the curriculum. One participant said that some commercial assessment products have no connection to what was learned in the classroom and felt the assessments' applications were unfair.

Best Practices – Assessment Tools: Deaf Culture Appropriate

The participants mentioned the importance of having the content of the assessment tool be relevant to the Deaf experience. The 'Deaf experience' is a reference to the traditional way of writing about Deaf people. This is to focus on the fact of their condition – that they don't hear – and to interpret all other aspects of their lives in light of this fact. Deaf experience is a shift away from this focus towards positive representations of Deaf people.¹⁵ One literacy practitioner explained the limitations of an existing assessment tool

“I came across a point such as speaking verbally on the phone, I'd tell them this doesn't apply to Deaf and that TTY¹⁶ and typing needed to be added; they saw my point and added this.”

¹⁵ Padden, C & Humphries, T (1998). *Deaf in America: Voices from a Culture*. Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.

¹⁶ TTY is also known as TDD, an acronym for Telecommunication Device for the Deaf.

Further Research Needed: Deaf or Hearing Assessor

The question “Should the assessor be Deaf or hearing?” was asked to some of the participants. Hearing participants and Deaf participants responded differently.

Deaf participants reported that the assessor should be Deaf. Some comments from Deaf participants were

“They must have Deaf experience, involved in the Deaf community. They’d have no “Deaf language” and couldn’t relate. They’d need to interact with Deaf people, different groups of Deaf people. A DI¹⁷ for example, they can change register and move back and forth with the language levels.”

“Hearing person can’t become an assessor because they don’t have the cultural understanding of oppression. Deaf people have more instinctual knowledge, understanding...hearing people wouldn’t have this so much...awareness of the history of oppression....”

“It depends on the decision made by the [Program Coordinator] whether to call in a [Deaf Assessor] or not. Another issue is that it’s not done by a native signer; the [Program Coordinator] isn’t truly knowledgeable about the various issues and her signing is not true ASL.”

Hearing participants reported that the assessor can be either Deaf or hearing as long as they have American Sign Language (ASL) skills and knowledge of Deaf culture. Most hearing participants depended

¹⁷ DI is an abbreviation for Deaf Interpreters. To date, AVLIC is currently working on the definition of a Deaf interpreter.

on sign language interpreters during assessments to ensure test validity.

A hearing participant said that

“Assessors need to know how to work with a sign language interpreter to make [sure] that the tool is valid statistically.”

Because of the clear division between Deaf and hearing respondents to this question, a best practice can't be recommended. It is recommended that further research in this area be done.

The Wish List

Participants were asked to provide a wish list of assessment tools and resources they want to see made available for their programs. The 3 most common wishes are

1. American Sign Language (ASL) Assessment Tool
2. ASL curriculum
3. Assessment tools designed for the Deaf learner

Wish #1 – ASL Assessment Tool

A standardized ASL-specific assessment tool was the most common wish across the delivery agencies. Participants shared that English based language assessments are widely available. They wish for a similar model in ASL. One participant shared that

“I would love to have something, again like I keep saying, that would help me understand what their English level is like...what their sign level is like.”

Various participants shared that they would like a Deaf norm referenced assessment tool to measure

ASL skills

- the learner’s ability to use ASL and knowledge of ASL

Translation skills

- the learner’s ability to bring and retain meaning back and forth between English and ASL

Wish #2 – American Sign Language Curriculum

An ASL curriculum was the second most common wish. Various participants reported that an ASL curriculum would

- show Deaf culture content
- support ASL language development

Wish #3 – Assessment tools designed for the Deaf learner

A wider range of tools was the third most common wish list. Various practitioners asked for a larger selection of Deaf norm referenced tools to measure progress of individual literacy goals. They reported that their current selection is not designed for Deaf adult learners and would like specific tools to assess specific skills.

CAMERA - An assessment tool developed for the Deaf Literacy Stream

CAMERA is an acronym for **C**ommunication and **M**ath **E**mployment **R**eadiness **A**ssessment. It assesses literacy levels for learners whose main goal is employment. It was originally developed by the Preparatory Training Programs (PTP)¹⁸ for the Anglophone literacy stream. PTP and Deaf Literacy Initiative (DLI) have worked together on the adaptation of the assessment tool for use within the Deaf Literacy stream.

Deaf stream CAMERA assesses the following skills

- reading
- writing
- numeracy
- document Use

The Deaf Stream CAMERA assessment tool can be used at any time during a learner's time with a Deaf Adult Literacy Program (DALP). It can be used

- upon entry
- during the program
- upon exit

As part of this study, Deaf stream CAMERA was described to the participants. They were then asked if they would be interested in using Deaf stream CAMERA in their programs. Most participants said they were interested.

¹⁸ <http://www.ptp.ca/>

Participants were then asked if they were willing to pilot Deaf Stream CAMERA in their program, again a majority of participants said yes. Some of their comments

“Yes, Double Yes!” “Absolutely, Yes”

“I am always looking for assessment tools that would be suitable”

The research shows that Deaf stream CAMERA will be the only assessment tool of its kind that has been developed for Deaf adult learners.

Conclusion

Assessment tools in Deaf Adult Literacy Programs (DALP) are lacking. All programs who participated in the research lacked a standardized American Sign Language (ASL) assessment tool. Many programs used English assessment tools that aren't designed for Deaf adults. As a result, adaptations to the assessment tools were made and the participants didn't report that these adapted tools had been tested for validation. In addition, many participants didn't receive training in assessment.

Based on the analysis of the data collected, the following recommendations for further research and/or resource development were suggested.

These recommendations will address gaps found in Deaf Adult Literacy Programs across Canada. Addressing these gaps will ensure that Deaf learners and practitioners in DAL programs have the tools they need for success.

Recommendation #1

Develop successive American Sign Language (ASL) literacy levels for Deaf Adults

To date, there are no established ASL literacy levels for Deaf adults. Deaf Literacy Initiative with the support from the government should establish a national committee to determine ASL levels for Deaf Adults. The committee should include a variety of expertise such as

- ASL linguists

- Deaf Adult Literacy Practitioners
- Assessment Experts
- Researchers

Recommendation #2

Develop standardized American Sign Language (ASL) assessment tools

This recommendation is tied to the development of ASL literacy levels for Deaf Adults

There are no standardized ASL assessment tools to measure ASL skills. The ASL assessment tool should refer to ASL literacy levels.

Standardized ASL assessment tools and ASL literacy levels for Deaf adults should be developed at the same time.

Recommendation #3

Develop an ASL curriculum

There is no ASL curriculum for Deaf Adults. Plans should begin immediately to develop an ASL curriculum to support the ASL language and literacy development of Deaf adults. The curriculum should take into consideration the needs and experiences of people who are

- born and raised in Canada
- Immigrants to Canada

Recommendation #4

Research Psycho-educational Assessment tools for Deaf Adults

The research showed limited data about psycho-educational assessment tools. More research is needed to learn about these tools. Deaf Literacy Initiative (DLI) should plan a research project with a group of psychologist to determine standards of psycho-educational assessment tools for Deaf Adults.

Recommendation #5

Develop assessment tools that are developed specifically for a Deaf learner

The practice of adapting assessment tools not originally designed for a Deaf learner must stop. Using these adapted tools produces unreliable and potentially skewed assessment results. DLI is currently developing a standardized adaption the CAMERA assessment tool. This tool will be specific to the needs of Deaf adult learners. Once complete, Deaf-stream CAMERA will be the only tool of its kind. More assessment tools developed specifically for the Deaf learner need to be developed.

Project Advisory Committee (PAC) Recommendations

This research was presented to the Project Advisory Committee (PAC) members on March 5th, 2011. The PAC members made two additional recommendations. They are recommendation #6 and recommendation #7.

Recommendation # 6

National Deaf Literacy Organization should be established and the organization should be a non-governmental organization.

Recommendation #7

Research and Development: Foundation of National Deaf Adult Literacy Organization

The PAC members recommended that research and development should be the foundation of the National Deaf Adult Literacy organization to guide and inform collaborative activities within each section:

- Curriculum Development
- Assessment
- Resources
- Literacy Practitioner Professional Development and Training

The PAC members stated that research and development would continue initiatives and innovations to bring standardized practices in Deaf Adult Literacy Programs across Canada.

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Appendix A: Invitation Letter

Welcome

The Deaf Literacy Initiative (DLI) has worked on various projects to increase Deaf literacy practitioners' access to ASL literacy and essential skills materials and resources for the Deaf community. We have a new project called, "Assessment and Assessment Process in Deaf Adult Literacy: A National Project" and it is funded by Office of Literacy and Essential Skills (OLES), a federal branch.

The purposes of the project are to learn about and to provide a snapshot of the assessment tools in Deaf Adult Literacy across Canada. It helps us to understand what assessment tools are being used. Also, we have adapted an assessment tool, CAMERA, in Ontario and would like to learn about your interest in such tool in your region.

CAMERA (Communication And Math Employment Readiness Assessment) requires the demonstration of skills in the areas of reading, writing, numeracy and document use. Some examples of document use are: completing a form, reading a schedule, and interpreting a graph.

The interview will help us to learn about the

- assessment used for Deaf Adults
- assessment process in Deaf Adult Literacy
- interest for a CAMERA assessment tool designed for Deaf Adults

The interview will take about 1 hour. Your identity and responses will be kept confidential and will not be published in oral or written reports.

You have the choice of responding in English or ASL. If you prefer to respond in ASL, we can do the interview through the web camera. Please email me at brent@deafliteracy.ca to set up an interview time. Thank you!

Appendix B: Consent Form

Consent Form

My name is Brent Novodvorski and I am researcher for the Deaf Literacy Initiative. I am inviting you to participate in the interview to share your experience and expertise. The purposes of the research project are to learn about

What are the assessments tools and assessment processes used with Deaf Adult Literacy learners?

What are the best practices in assessing Deaf adults?

Are the Deaf Adult Literacy programs interested in using CAMERA on a national level?

About the Interview

The Interview involves answering the above questions as well as other related questions about assessments and assessment process in Deaf Adult Literacy. It will take approximately one hour.

Your participation is completely voluntary.

You may withdraw at any time prior to the publication date of the final report.

All information obtained will be kept strictly confidential.

All identifying information will be removed from the collected materials one year after the publication date of the final report.

All materials will be stored securely with the researcher in the computer.
Only the researcher can access the computer.

All materials will be shredded one year after the publication date of the final report.

The publication date is on November 15th, 2010¹⁹.

Consent

I agree to participate in the interview

Yes [] No []

I agree to be videotaped

Yes [] No []

I agree to be quoted directly if my name is not published (This means your name will remain anonymous)

Yes [] No []

I wish to review the notes, transcripts, or other data collected during the interview pertaining to my participation

Yes [] No []

By signing this consent form, you are indicating that you fully understand the above information and agree to participate.

Participant Signature: _____ Date: _____

¹⁹ The project deadline was adjusted to meet the increased number of participants. The new deadline is March, 2011.

Researcher's signature: _____ Date: _____

Please mail or fax the completed consent form:

Mail:

Deaf Literacy Initiative
(FAX)
420 Britannia Road East, Unit #109
Mississauga, Ontario L4Z 3L5

Fax:

905-897-6676

Appendix C: Interview Questions

Description of Program

1. What is your name and job title?
2. Are you Deaf or hearing?
3. How many years have you worked in your position?
4. Is your program full time or part time or both?
5. What courses do you offer?
6. How many students do you have in each course?
7. How many students do you have in the program?
8. How many are Deaf?
9. How many are Deaf-Blind?
10. How many students have one on one supports? (For example, a Health care aide)
11. What are the goals of your program?

Curriculum

1. What curriculum are you using?

2. Does your program use Canada's Essential Skills as a guide for curriculum contents and classroom activities and choice of resources?

Yes [] No []

3. Does your program use Canadian Language Benchmarks as a guide for curriculum contents and classroom activities and choice of resources?

Yes [] No []

Assessment: ASL

1. Do you have assessment tools to determine the learner's ASL knowledge and competency?

Yes [] No []

2. Were they developed by practitioners in your program?

Yes [] No []

3. Are they informal?

Yes [] No []

4. Who chooses these tools?

5. Who does this assessment?

(Example: Learner's Teacher, Group of Teachers, Program Coordinators or people from other Departments)

6. What are the strengths and weaknesses of these tools?

Assessment: Part A

1. What tools does your program use for new learners before they go in your program?

Please list.

- a. How do you get information from the learners in this assessment?

(Example: Checklist, Observations, Writing sample, Demonstration Activities, etc)

- b. What are the purposes of this assessment tool?

- c. Who chooses the tools?

- d. Who does the assessment?

(Example: Learner's Teacher, Group of Teachers, Program Coordinators or people from other Departments)

- e. What are the strengths and weaknesses of your tools?

2. What tools does your program use to determine placement or which courses/program for your new learner?

Please List.

- a. How do you get information from the learners in this assessment?

(Example: Checklist, Observations, Writing sample, Demonstration Activities, etc)

- b. Who chooses the tools?

- c. Who does the assessment?

(Example: Learner's Teacher, Group of Teachers, Program Coordinators or people from other Departments)

- d. What are the strengths and weaknesses of your tools?

Assessment: Part B

- 1. What tools does your program use to track learner progress through the program?

- a. How do you get information from the learners in this assessment?

(Example: Tests, Learner Portfolio, Checklist, Observations, Writing sample, Demonstration Activities, etc)

- b. What are the purposes of this assessment tool?

- c. Who chooses the tools?

- d. Who does the assessment?

(Example: Learner's Teacher, Group of Teachers, Program Coordinators or people from other Departments)

- e. What are the strengths and weaknesses of your tools?

Assessment: Part C

- 1. What tools does your program use when the student completes the course? What tool do you use to determine if the student is ready to move on to the next level or move to another program?

- a. How do you get information from the learners in this assessment?

(Example: Checklist, Observations, Writing sample, Demonstration Activities, etc)

- b. Who chooses the tools?

- c. Who does the assessment?

(Example: Learner's Teacher, Group of Teachers, Program Coordinators or people from other Departments)

Assessment Process

1. What specific characteristics (knowledge and skills) do assessors need in order to deliver the assessment of Deaf adults?
2. If the assessment tools need to be adapted for Deaf learners, what do you think about and look for?
3. What are the best practices in assessments in Deaf Adult Literacy?

Other

1. Would you like to receive professional development on assessments for the Deaf Adult Literacy stream?
2. Did you get training to use the assessment tools? Which ones?
3. What assessment tools would you like to have? Why?

Adapted Assessment Tool for the Deaf

1. Would you be interested in an assessment tool that has been designed specifically for the Deaf stream?

Yes [] No []

2. Are you interested in CAMERA – Deaf Stream assessment tool?

Yes [] No []

3. Would you be willing to work with DLI to pilot the CAMERA assessment tool with your learners?

Yes [] No []

Appendix D: Interview Questions (French Version)

Description du programme

4. Comment appelez-vous et quel est le titre de votre poste ?
5. Êtes-vous une personne sourde ou entendante ?
6. Combien d'années avez-vous occupé ce poste ?
7. Est-ce que votre programme est offert à temps plein, à temps partiel, ou les deux ?
8. Quels cours offrez-vous ?
9. Combien d'apprenants avez-vous dans chaque cours ?
10. Combien d'apprenants est-ce qu'il y a dans le programme ?
11. Combien sont des personnes sourdes ?
12. Combien sont des personnes sourdes et aveugles ?
13. Combien d'apprenants bénéficient de soutien individuel ? (par exemple, un aide-soignant)
14. Quels sont les buts de votre programme ?

Curriculum

4. Quel programme d'enseignement utilisez-vous ?

5. Est-ce que votre programme se sert des Compétences essentielles du Canada pour guider les décisions en matière du contenu du programme d'enseignement, d'activités dans la salle de classe, et le choix des ressources ?

Oui [] Non []

6. Est-ce que votre programme se sert des Niveaux de compétence linguistique canadiens pour guider les décisions en matière du contenu du programme d'enseignement, d'activités dans la salle de classe, et le choix des ressources ?

Oui [] Non []

Évaluation : ASL

7. Disposez-vous d'outils d'évaluation pour déterminer la connaissance et compétence de l'apprenant par rapport à l'ASL ?

Oui [] Non []

8. Est-ce qu'ils étaient élaborés par des intervenants dans votre programme ?

Oui [] Non []

9. Sont-ils informels ?

Oui [] Non []

10. Qui choisit ces outils ?

11. Qui accomplit cette évaluation ?

(Exemple : Enseignant de l'apprenant, groupe d'enseignants, coordonnateurs du programme ou des personnes appartenant à d'autres divisions)

12. Quels sont les points forts et points faibles de ces outils ?

Évaluation : Partie A

3. De quels outils se sert votre programme pour de nouveaux apprenants avant qu'ils ne se joignent à votre programme ?

Prière de les indiquer.

a. De quelle manière élicitez-vous des informations de la part des apprenants au cours de cette évaluation ?

(Exemple : Liste de contrôle, observations, échantillon d'écriture, activités de démonstration, etc.)

b. Quels sont les buts de cet outil d'évaluation ?

c. Qui choisit les outils ?

d. Qui accomplit l'évaluation ?

(Exemple : Enseignant de l'apprenant, groupe d'enseignants, coordonnateurs du programme ou des personnes appartenant à d'autres divisions)

e. Quels sont les points forts et point faibles de vos outils ?

4. De quels outils se sert votre programme pour déterminer le placement ou les cours ou le programme pour votre nouvel apprenant ?

Prière de les indiquer.

a. De quelle manière élicitez-vous des informations de la part des apprenants au cours de cette évaluation ?

(Exemple : Liste de contrôle, observations, échantillon d'écriture, activités de démonstration, etc.)

b. Qui choisit les outils ?

c. Qui accomplit l'évaluation ?

(Exemple : Enseignant de l'apprenant, groupe d'enseignants, coordonnateurs du programme ou des personnes appartenant à d'autres divisions)

d. Quels sont les points forts et points faibles de vos outils ?

Évaluation : Partie B

2. De quels outils se sert votre programme pour suivre le progrès des apprenants au cours du programme ?

f. De quelle manière élicitez-vous des informations de la part des apprenants au cours de cette évaluation ?

(Exemple : Examens, portfolio de l'apprenant, liste de contrôle, observations, échantillon d'écriture, activités de démonstration, etc.)

g. Quels sont les buts de cet outil d'évaluation ?

h. Qui choisit les outils ?

i. Qui accomplit l'évaluation ?

(Exemple : Enseignant de l'apprenant, groupe d'enseignants, coordonnateurs du programme ou des personnes appartenant à d'autres divisions)

j. Quels sont les points forts et points faibles de vos outils ?

Évaluation : Partie C

2. De quels outils se sert votre programme lorsque l'apprenant termine le cours ? Quel outil employez-vous pour déterminer si l'apprenant

est prêt à poursuivre la prochaine étape ou entreprendre un autre programme ?

- a. De quelle manière élicitez-vous des informations de la part des apprenants au cours de cette évaluation ?

(Exemple : Liste de contrôle, observations, échantillon d'écriture, activités de démonstration, etc.)

- b. Qui choisit les outils ?

- c. Qui accomplit l'évaluation ?

(Exemple : Enseignant de l'apprenant, groupe d'enseignants, coordonnateurs du programme ou des personnes appartenant à d'autres divisions)

Processus d'évaluation

- 4. Quels traits spécifiques (connaissances et habiletés) doivent les évaluateurs posséder afin d'exécuter l'évaluation des adultes sourds ?
- 5. Si les outils d'évaluation nécessitent une adaptation pour les apprenants sourds, à quel genre de choses pensez-vous et quel genre de choses cherchez-vous ?
- 6. Quelles sont les pratiques exemplaires en ce qui concerne les évaluations dans le cadre de l'alphabétisation des adultes sourds ?

Divers

- 4. Aimeriez-vous bénéficier d'un perfectionnement professionnel à l'égard des évaluations pour le volet d'alphabétisation des adultes sourds ?

5. Avez-vous reçu une formation pour vous servir des outils d'évaluation ? Lesquels ?
6. Quels outils d'évaluations aimeriez-vous avoir à votre disposition ? Pourquoi ?

Outil d'évaluation adapté pour les personnes sourdes

1. Vous intéresseriez-vous à l'outil d'évaluation qui a été conçu spécialement pour le volet des personnes sourdes ?
Oui [] Non []
2. Vous intéressez-vous à l'outil d'évaluation pour le volet des personnes sourdes – CAMERA ?
Oui [] Non []
3. Seriez-vous disposé(e) à travailler en collaboration avec la DLI afin de lancer un projet pilote de l'outil d'évaluation CAMERA auprès de vos apprenants ?
Oui [] Non []

Merci de votre participation !

Appendix E: Focus Group Questions

Focus Group

Background

Deaf Literacy Initiative has adapted the CAMERA assessment tool. It requires learner demonstration of reading, writing, numeracy and document use. The resource will help practitioners to provide suitable literacy support for learners whose main goal is employment. We want to share the resource on a national level. In order to understand the steps required to bring it on a national level, we would like your input.

Purpose

The purposes of the focus group are to learn about the

- assessments available for Deaf Adult Literacy
- assessment process
- interest for a standardized assessment tool

Focus Group Protocol

1. Everybody has the opportunity to provide their input.
2. Please do not interrupt when another person speaks.
3. Please respond to the questions to the best of your ability.
4. Please do not share other people's input at all.
5. If you want to follow up with questions or things you wanted to share, please feel free to e-mail me at brent@deafliteracy.ca

Researcher's Role

The roles of the researcher are

- facilitate the focus group
- provide questions
- collect information

Questions

Program Profile

12. Please tell me about your program.
13. What courses do you offer?
14. How many students do you have in the program? In each courses?
 - a. How many students have special needs?
 - b. How many are Deaf?
 - c. How many are Deaf-Blind?
15. What are the goals of your program?

Curriculum

1. What curriculum are you using?
2. Does your program use Canada's Essential Skills as a guide for curriculum contents and classroom activities and choice of resources?
Yes [] No []
3. Does your program use Canadian Language Benchmarks as a guide for curriculum contents and classroom activities and choice of resources?
Yes [] No []

Focus: Assessment

13. What kind of assessment tools do you have?
14. What are the purposes of the assessment tools you have? What do they assess?

15. Which ones do you think fit well with your learners?
16. What made it fit well with your learners?
17. What specific characteristics (knowledge and skills) do assessors need in order to deliver the assessment of Deaf adults?
18. If assessment tools need to be adapted for Deaf learners, what do you think about and look for?

Focus: Assessment Process

19. What does the assessment process look like in your program?
20. What did you like about the assessment process?

Focus: Standardized Assessment Tool

1. Would you be interested in a standardized assessment tool that has been designed specifically for the Deaf stream?
Yes [] No []
2. Are you interested in CAMERA assessment tool?
Yes [] No []
3. Would you be interested in allowing DLI to pilot the CAMERA assessment tool with your learners?
Yes [] No []