

COMMUNITY LITERACY OF ONTARIO E-COMMUNIQUE ON INDEPENDENCE JANUARY 2012

Independence is one of five goal paths for adult literacy learners in Ontario. Community Literacy of Ontario (CLO) believes that independence is a very important goal, and is in fact foundational to all of the other goal paths.

In this CLO e-communiqué, we will explore the definition of independence – as a goal path in Ontario’s adult literacy field and as an integrated part of other provincial and national initiatives. We will share how independence skills are also viewed as critically important to other government ministries and to employers. We will also examine how independence has been defined within some international contexts to highlight its importance.

Defining Independence

Defining independence is as challenging as defining literacy itself because independence means different things to different people, and is greatly influenced by context. However, as a starting point, we will go to the dictionary for this definition:

Independent:

1. a) Not depending on authority or control; b) Self-governing
2. a) Not depending on another person for one’s opinion or livelihood;
b) Making it unnecessary to earn one’s living



Even here, we see a connection to employment! Greater independence can mean self-sufficiency to the extent that you don’t have to depend on others for your livelihood. But independence is much more than that – it’s about being in control of your own life.

Independence and the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities

The importance of independence has been acknowledged and reinforced through its inclusion as one of five goal paths recognized through the Ministry of Training, Colleges and University’s Ontario Adult Literacy Curriculum Framework (OALCF). The OALCF is a competency-based framework that supports the development of adult literacy programming and the transition of learners to their goals of work, further education and training, or independence. For more information about the OALCF, please visit www.tcu.gov.on.ca/eng/eopg/oalcf/

Recently, MTCU came up with its own definition of independence for the purposes of the Ontario Adult Literacy Curriculum Framework:

An independence goal can encompass a variety of outcomes, expectations or concepts of success based on a learner's particular needs. In general however, LBS programming for independence can be organized under four broad sets of objectives:

- manage basic needs
- manage health
- manage personal issues and relationships
- participate fully as a member of the community



Source: *Goal Path Description for Practitioners and Learners – Independence: Ontario Adult Literacy Curriculum Framework. Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities, October 2011*
www.tcu.gov.on.ca/eng/eopq/publications/OALCF_GPD_Independence_Oct_11.pdf

Here, MTCU refers to the breadth and the impact of independence – can you think of very many tasks that couldn't fall under one of the above four categories? Independence, as defined by MTCU, applies to virtually all aspects of a person's life. While this goal path doesn't specifically mention employment, the skills required to be independent greatly influence someone's ability to be employed.

Independence Skills and the Ontario Ministry of Education

The concept of independence and the skills that need to be taught to promote or achieve independence are not just of interest to the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities. The Ontario Ministry of Education (MED) places an extremely high value on "learning skills and work habits."

In fact, the Ministry of Education has put learning skills and work habits at the forefront of how it assesses and evaluates learning in Ontario's elementary and secondary schools. MED's new way of assessing students is overviewed in its recent report called *Growing Success: Assessment, Evaluation, and Reporting in Ontario Schools*.

In *Growing Success* the learning skills and work habits that are emphasized and considered foundational to learning by the Ministry of Education are:

- Responsibility
- Organization
- Independent Work
- Collaboration
- Initiative
- Self-regulation



It is clear that these six skills are required in order for someone to manage their basic needs, their health, their personal issues and relationships and to participate fully as a member of the community.

Growing Success clearly states the importance of preparing students for employment and life experiences as well as academic experiences when it says:

“The development of learning skills and work habits needed to succeed in school and in life begins early in a child’s schooling. As students move through the grades, they develop and then consolidate their learning skills and work habits in preparation for postsecondary education and the world of work.”

Source: www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/policyfunding/growSuccess.pdf

Independence Skills and the Ontario Skills Passport

The Ontario Ministry of Education, through its own research and building upon research from Human Resources and Skills Development Canada and the Conference Board of Canada, developed the Ontario Skills Passport (OSP).

Additional information on the OSP can be found at:
<http://skills.edu.gov.on.ca/OSPWeb/jsp/en/login.jsp>

Through its *Essential Skills and Work Habits* section of its website, the Ontario Skills Passport highlights the importance of independence skills such as:

- working safely
- teamwork
- reliability
- organization
- working independently
- initiative
- self-advocacy
- customer service
- entrepreneurship

To learn more, see: <http://skills.edu.gov.on.ca/OSPWeb/jsp/en/OSPskillsandworkhabits.jsp#4>

Skill lists from the Ontario Ministry of Education and the Ontario Skills Passport have further education and training and/or employment as potential goals, but these skills also support and lead to the goal of independence. In fact, these skills are the foundational skills that people need in order to pursue further goals, including further education, training and employment.



Getting Started

OSP News

OSP Partners

Resource for Employment
Ontario Programs

Independence Skills and the Ontario Chamber of Commerce

Employers as well are keenly interested in independence skills. For example, in its **OCC Skilled Workforce Policies 2011-2012** the Ontario Chamber of Commerce highlights that:

“As Ontario’s economy progresses, it will depend more and more on individuals with the core skills necessary to compete in emerging sectors of the economy. A few core skills that are currently in demand are:

- *Advanced skills with technology, and how to apply technology effectively to business*
- *Management leadership skills*
- *Interpersonal skills*
- *Team-building skills*
- *Computer skills*
- *Information sourcing and management*



Providing all members of society with the opportunity to develop new skills and apply them to the jobs that are in demand is the surest way for Ontario to meet the challenges of the 21st century.”

Source: www.occ.on.ca/assets/OCC-Skilled-Workforce-Policies_2011.pdf

Notable among this list of skills are interpersonal and team-building skills which land solidly within the realm of independence.

Independence Skills and the Conference Board of Canada

In its role as an informer for government on economic trends, the Conference Board of Canada published *Employability Skills 2000+*. This report demonstrates that basic employability skills involve a wide variety of independence skills including the ability to:

- Demonstrate positive attitudes and behaviours
- Be responsible
- Be adaptable
- Learn continuously
- Work safely
- Work with others
- Communicate effectively



“Employability Skills 2000+ are the critical skills you need in the workplace. Employability Skills 2000+ include communication, problem solving, positive attitudes and behaviours, adaptability, working with others, and science, technology and mathematic skills...Employability Skills 2000+can also be applied beyond the workplace in your daily and personal activities.”

Source: http://xnet.rrc.mb.ca/library/guides2/careers/page_12.htm

Independence Skills and Literacy Powerline

CLO thought it might be useful to take a look at literacy and independence outside of Canada. We approached Dr. Tom Sticht, an internationally renowned literacy researcher, and asked him if he knew of any good definitions for independence as a literacy goal. He directed us to Literacy Powerline – a national organization that promotes addressing literacy through community involvement. Literacy Powerline has defined five pillars of literacy:

- Pillar 1: Building the Community
- Pillar 2: Strengthening the Family
- Pillar 3: Ensuring the People’s Right to Self-Determination
- Pillar 4: Improving the Workforce
- Pillar 5: Transforming the Literacy System



Pillars 1 to 3 are directly related to independence goals.

Source: www.literacypowerline.com/?s=pillar

Independence Skills and Scotland

Scotland’s *Adult Literacy and Numeracy Curriculum* provides the following three contexts of literacy that easily relate to Ontario’s view of independence:

- To be literate and numerate is not only to have the mechanical skills of encoding and decoding symbols but also the knowledge, skills and understanding that enable us to do what we want to do in our private, family, community and working lives.
- The key life areas and social contexts in which literacy and numeracy are used are important in deciding on what is to be learned.
- Literacy and numeracy skills are almost always employed for a purpose - such as making decisions or solving problems - and in a particular social context.



Source: www.aloscotland.com/alo/files/ALNCurriculumFramework.pdf and www.aloscotland.com/alo/123.html

Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development’s “Definition and Selection of Competencies Project”

The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development’s (OECD) “*Definition and Selection of Competencies*” project was designed to develop a strategy for defining and measuring skills. Some of the skills identified in this report directly related to independence skills:

Interacting in Heterogeneous Groups

- The ability to relate well to others
- The ability to cooperate and work in teams
- The ability to manage and resolve conflicts

Acting Autonomously

- The ability to act within the bigger picture
- The ability to form and conduct life plans and personal projects
- The ability to defend and assert rights, interests, limits, and needs



Source: www.oecd.org/dataoecd/48/22/41529556.pdf

Conclusion

Independence is known by many names and there are very few consistent definitions of it. Yet, if we look at literacy for independence as being the skills needed for private, family, work, and community life, then the number of reasons why someone would seek literacy for independence is huge.

Independence has been strongly affirmed as one of five learner goal paths by the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities under the new Ontario Adult Literacy Curriculum Framework. As well, the Ministry of Education – the Ministry charged with educating today’s children and tomorrow’s leaders – is specifically looking at equipping children with skills to be responsible, organized and collaborative. These two examples clearly demonstrate that the skills that are inherent in independence goals have also begun to be prioritized by government.

As well, the workplace is taking note that independence skills, such as communication, problem-solving and adaptability, are incredibly important – perhaps more important than occupation-specific skills. Ontario is certainly not alone in its integration of independence as an important goal or result of literacy. Literacy agencies, adult learners, government ministries, employers and other countries value the importance of independence not only as it applies to employment or to further education and training, but also as it applies to private, family and community life.

And so, it seems that we cannot overstate the importance of independence. In fact, we may be understating it. Regardless of an Ontario literacy learner’s goal – whether it be for independence, secondary school credit, apprenticeship, employment or postsecondary education – the skills required for independence are also integral to ensuring that learner’s future success.

Independence at a Glance:

Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities <i>Ontario Adult Literacy Curriculum Framework</i>	Ministry of Education's <i>Growing Success Report</i>	Ontario Skills Passport <i>Essential Skills and Work Habits</i>	Conference Board of Canada's <i>Employability Skills 2000+ Report</i>
Manage basic needs	Responsibility	Working safely	Communication
Manage health	Organization	Teamwork	Problem solving
Manage personal issues and relationships	Independent Work	Reliability	Positive attitudes and behaviours
Participate fully as a member of the community	Collaboration	Organization	Adaptability
	Initiative	Working independently	Working with others
	Self-regulation	Initiative	Responsibility
		Self-advocacy	Learn continuously
		Customer service	Work safely
		Entrepreneurship	