

# Best Practices in Action



Pictures Courtesy RWED/GNWT

## Tools for Community-Based Adult Literacy and Basic Education Programs



NWT Literacy Council



Northwest  
Territories Education, Culture and Employment



Human Resources and  
Skills Development Canada  
National Literacy Secretariat

Ressources humaines et  
Développement des compétences Canada  
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*Best Practices in Action* is a joint project of Aurora College, the Department of Education, Culture and Employment and the NWT Literacy Council.



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Copies of this manual are available from:

- The NWT Literacy Council at the above address, or from our website (see address above).
- Aurora College or the Department of Education, Culture and Employment (see addresses above).

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Many adult educators and literacy practitioners from across the Northwest Territories contributed to the *Resource Manual of Practical Ideas*. Their work at the community level demonstrates best practices in action.

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Best Practices in Action





## Introduction

# A Summary of Adult Literacy and Basic Education in the NWT

In the north, the history of adult literacy and basic education spans about fifty years. During that time, many changes have occurred in adult programs as a result of an on-going process of developing, reflecting on, and reviewing goals, activities and outcomes.

In recent years, there have been significant changes, too, in the field of literacy. These include defining literacy more broadly, developing new forms of programs, and promoting the importance of literacy more vigorously. These changes stem partly from interventions related to literacy, such as:

- The Government of the Northwest Territories' (GNWT) Literacy Strategy
- The GNWT's Early Childhood Development Framework for Action, with its emphasis on the role of parents in children's literacy development
- The GNWT's Aboriginal Language Strategy
- The NWT Literacy Council's focus on family literacy
- The increased emphasis on literacy in schools
- The involvement of the private sector in support of literacy.

The changes have brought new opportunities for adult educators to tie programs more closely to learners' needs by expanding the types of programs offered in the north. Today adult literacy programs include:



- Community-based adult literacy and basic education (ALBE) programs
- Campus-based adult literacy and basic education programs
- Aboriginal language programs
- English as a Second Language (ESL) programs
- Workplace literacy programs
- Seniors' literacy programs
- Family literacy programs
- Literacy Programs in correctional facilities.

## Best Practices and why they are Important

Our ability to plan, develop, deliver and sustain high quality adult literacy programs depends on our willingness to examine what we do critically: to retain what is effective; to throw out what is ineffective; and to plan and implement changes in areas that we would like to improve or develop. Over the years, through such research and reflection, we have been able to articulate a philosophy of adult literacy learning. Rooted in this philosophy is a set of practices that represent our current understanding of key ingredients that lead to effective programs.

In Britain, educators use the term “good practice” to describe such practices, whereas in North America people are more likely to refer to them as “best practices”. Sometimes people use “best practices” and “quality standards” interchangeably. However, they are different. A “standard” is set up and established by a person or an organization with the authority to do so. It provides a rule for a measure of value or quality. Quality standards often form part of a larger accountability or evaluation framework, and may incorporate best practices into them. Best practices, on the other hand, simply describe practices that support our philosophy of adult education—





practices that we know are effective. Collectively, they are an ideal or a goal to work towards.

Defining best practices is useful to both new and experienced adult educators, to policy makers, to funders and to service providers in a variety of ways. They can:

- Be an ideal or a goal to work towards.
- Be a framework for effective practice.
- Be a guide for program planning and development.
- Be a guide to inform and improve practice.
- Encourage reflection on critical issues by those developing, implementing and evaluating adult literacy and basic education programs.
- Transform practice.
- Be a tool to promote programs to stakeholders and other community members.

Best practice statements are *not* meant to:

- Be mandatory or definitive.
- Force all programs to be the same.
- Be a means of formally monitoring or evaluating programs.

There is a risk in codifying best practices, however, and simplifying them to a checklist. It is relatively easy for people to say “We’re doing that!” For that reason we are including examples of best practices in action, and specific ways of supporting best practices to try to give a broader view of what best practices might be in reality.



# Best Practice Statements for the NWT

In 2002, the Department of Education, Culture and Employment, Aurora College and the NWT Literacy Council began the Best Practices in Action Project. Representatives from these three organizations were selected to be part of a Best Practices in Action Working Group that would guide the project.

The idea was to create a comprehensive framework of best practices that would encourage literacy providers to reflect on their practice and learn from others. The framework has three tools:

## 1. A self-assessment tool for programs

This tool consists of 17 best practice statements, followed by several key elements and indicators. Each statement describes a key concept that we have identified as integral to effective programs from current research and from practitioners in the field in the NWT and elsewhere.

One or more key elements and a range of indicators follow each best practice statement. When implemented, these will help achieve that best practice. Instructors can check off each key element and indicator as a way to gauge the strengths of their programs, and to identify areas where they want to make improvements. This self-assessment tool will serve as a means to continuously improve programs.

At the end of this tool, readers will find a summary of research on the evolution of literacy best practices, and on how various jurisdictions in Canada and elsewhere address them.



**2. A resource of practical ideas to help support best practices**

No matter how experienced and skilled practitioners are, they always welcome new ideas. Adult educators across the north have a wealth of experience that everyone can benefit from. Many have shared their “best” ideas with us and we have compiled them into a resource from which everyone can learn.

**3. Examples of best practices in action in NWT programs**

Many community-based adult literacy programs demonstrate best practices principles. We have selected two as examples of how programs build best practices into their own situation.

Originally, we intended that the *Best Practices in Action* document would be useful for all programs that involved adult literacy, such as ALBE, family literacy and workplace literacy programs. However, as the drafts changed over time, we realized that the manual could not be all things to all people. Much of it is classroom-based, so its focus now is on ALBE programs.

## Guiding Principles

The five principles for adult literacy and basic education programs set out in the Department of Education, Culture and Employment’s Directive on Adult Literacy and Basic Education underlie the work on best practices.

These principles are:

- Learner-centred programming and services
- Accessible programming and services
- Coordinated and integrated programming and services
- Community-based programming and services
- Respect for cultural diversity.

The Directive explains each of these more fully.



# NWT Best Practice Statements

In the end, the NWT Working Group, with input from a broad range of adult educators, settled on 17 best practice statements:

- Philosophy
- Program Planning
- Program Evaluation
- Program Accessibility
- Instruction
- Learning Materials
- Learner Assessment
- Respect and Support for Learners
- Transferability of Learning
- Culture
- Community
- Outreach
- Organizational Linkages and Partnerships
- Staff Development and Support
- Funding
- Program Administration
- Accountability