



*Community Literacy of Ontario*  
**RESEARCH REPORT**

**PDQ PILOTING  
PROJECT**

**June 2008**

# PDQ Piloting Project Research Report

Community Literacy of Ontario  
80 Bradford Street, Suite 508  
Barrie, Ontario, Canada L4N 6S7  
Tel: 705-733-2312 Fax: 705-733-6197  
E-mail: [clo@bellnet.ca](mailto:clo@bellnet.ca)  
[www.nald.ca/clo.htm](http://www.nald.ca/clo.htm)  
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Researcher/Writer: Robyn Cook-Ritchie

Project Manager: Jette Cosburn

Copy Editor: Tamara Kaattari

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North Algoma Literacy Coalition (Wawa)  
North Bay Literacy Council (North Bay)  
Prince Edward Learning Centre (Picton)  
Street Haven Learning Centre (Toronto)

Community Literacy of Ontario thanks the 75 adult students who participated in this pilot study.

**EMPLOYMENT  
ONTARIO**

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# Community Literacy of Ontario

## PDQ Pilot Research Report

### Background

#### Learner Skill Attainment Framework

Learner Skill Attainment (LSA) is one of MTCU's nine draft measures of agency performance for effectiveness. A working group of 45 members, representing all sectors, streams, stakeholders and original projects was convened early in 2007 by MTCU to facilitate the development of the LSA framework. Community Literacy of Ontario (CLO) was an active participant in the LSA Framework Development Team, collaborating on, and sharing in, the development of the framework and its components. The **Learner Skill Attainment Framework Validation Draft** is based on the IALS/Essential Skills scales and uses a "pathway" approach. Five distinct learner transition pathways have been identified:

- Foundations for Independence
- Employment
- Apprenticeship
- College Postsecondary
- Secondary School Credit

#### Assessment Instruments

During this initial phase, the Learner Skill Attainment development team identified two potential assessment instruments, both of which are valid and reliable and based on the 500-point IALS/Essential Skills Scale. The first instrument was the Test of Workplace Essential Skills (TOWES), developed by Bow Valley College. The second was the Prose, Document and Quantitative (PDQ) Profile Series, adult literacy test, developed by Educational Testing Services (ETS). Both TOWES and PDQ are available in French and English, use Item Response Theory and are articulated to the 500-point IALS/Essential Skills Scale. CLO selected PDQ as the most relevant and appropriate tool to build on our previous Learner Skill Attainment research work conducted as part of the MTCU-funded project *"Success Indicators for Independence Goals"* and supported MTCU's Learner Skill Attainment initiative. Funding was received in December 2007 to conduct a field test of PDQ through May 2008.

CLO was able to determine how the eight pilot sites and 75 adult learners responded to PDQ - a tool that assesses an individual's proficiency in performing general literacy tasks. Several aspects were considered including the amount of time required to administer and to monitor the tests; all the costs involved in administering and monitoring the tests, including but not limited to the actual test material and staffing costs; responses from adult students as to the test-taking process and the content and complexity of the tests; responses from the agency staff as to the validity of the skill attainment measurement itself; and responses from the agency staff and test participants as to the relevance and quality of the materials that they piloted.

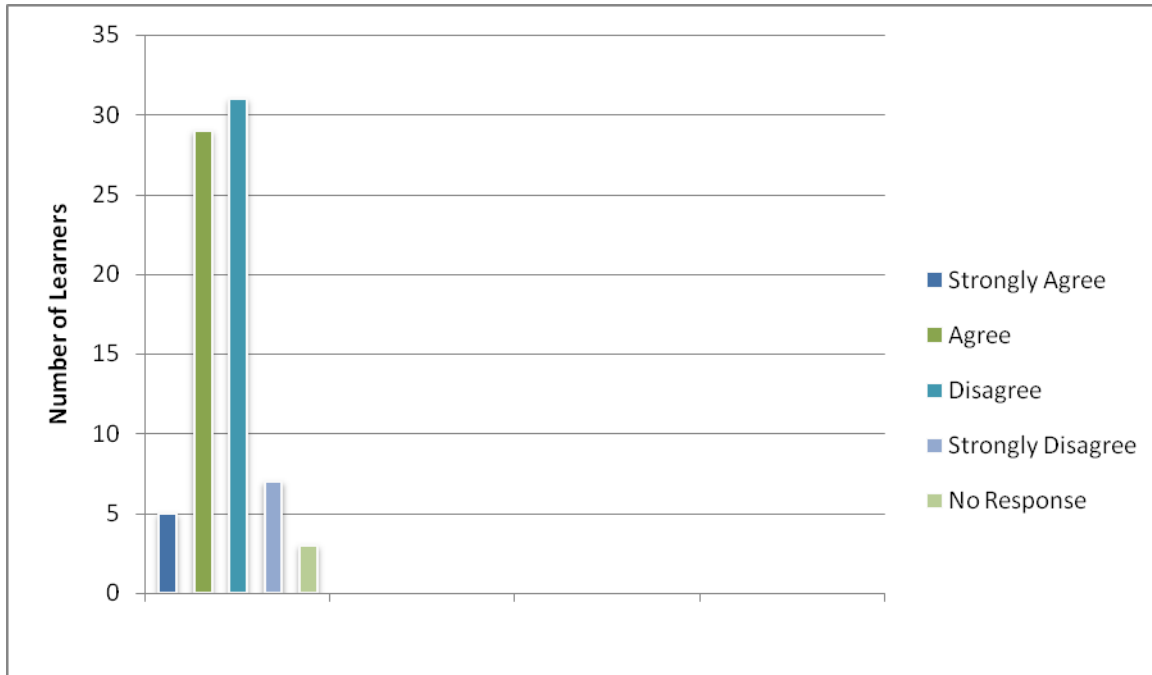
Participating agencies were asked to do the following:

1. Appoint a representative to be the agency lead for the piloting process. The agency lead was expected to take the PDQ Profile Series full length assessment to become familiar with the assessment process and the content. The agency lead was also expected to become familiar with the PDQ website and with troubleshooting strategies on the site.
2. Meet via teleconference with the project coordinator in January 2008 to review the PDQ Profile Series assessment tool and the piloting process.
3. Complete PDQ Profile Series full length assessments with ten learners. Each agency was also asked to complete a second PDQ Profile Series full length assessment with two learners from its program.
4. Provide thoughtful verbal and written feedback (by responding to the series of questions that were provided by CLO), evaluating the PDQ Profile Series full length test from the perspective of the learner, the supervising practitioner and the agency.

# The Results

## Part A: Learner Feedback

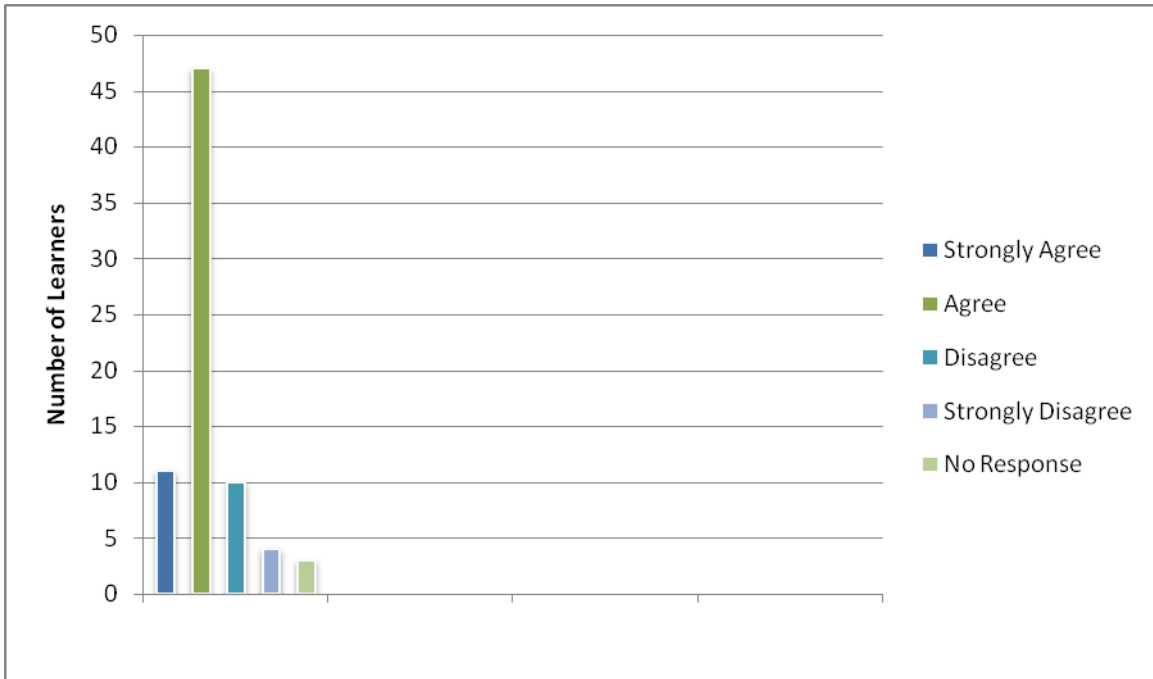
When I write tests I usually feel relaxed.



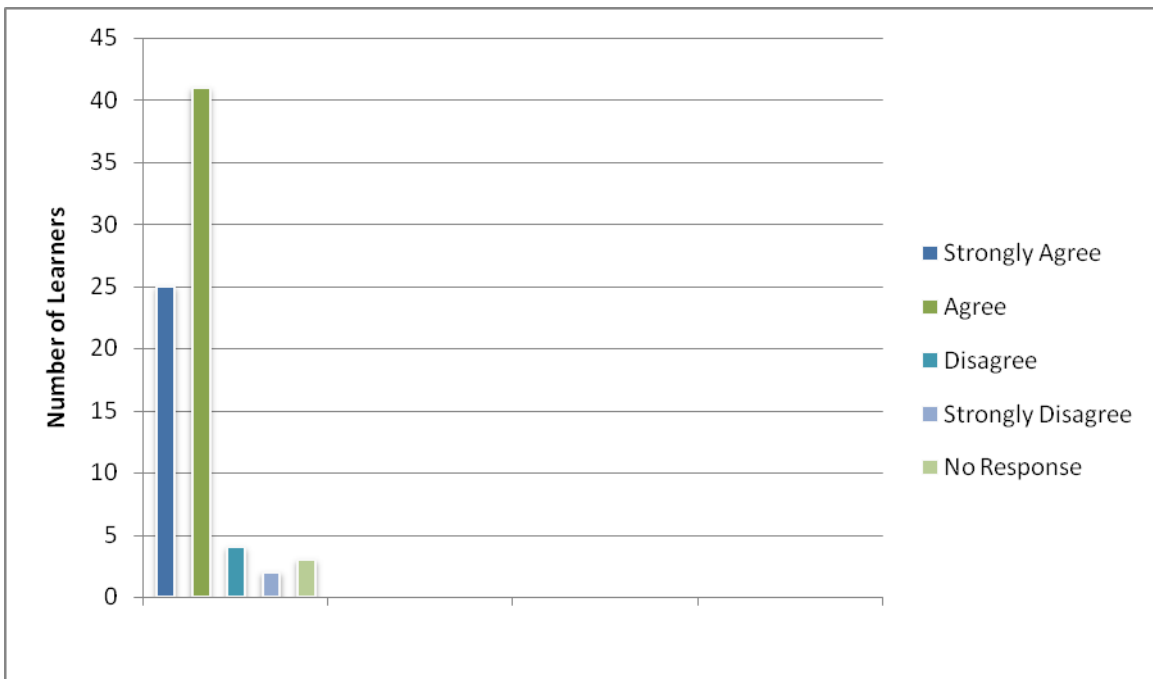
### Learner Comments:

- I did however feel relaxed with the computer
- I feel very stressed when I take any kind of tests
- I feel afraid
- I felt relaxed
- I was even more nervous writing the test on the computer
- I am always nervous
- I don't like tests
- I am usually tense and afraid
- I am usually a little nervous
- I do not usually get stressed about doing a test
- Usually a mess
- I feel like I'm not going to do so well.
- When I write tests I get very up tight
- I am very nervous when I do tests, this one was complicated
- When I hear "test" I get nervous and don't do so well

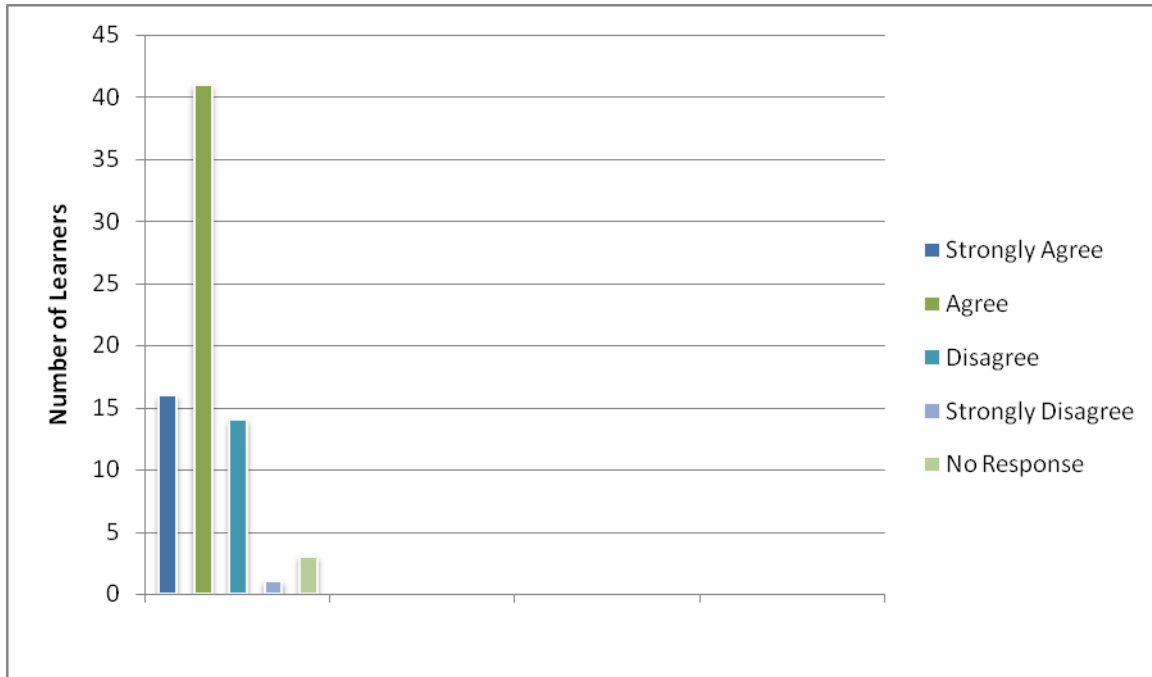
**Overall, I felt well rested and had a good breakfast/lunch/dinner before I wrote the test.**



**The place where I took the test was quiet and free from distractions.**



## The PDQ test instructions were clear.

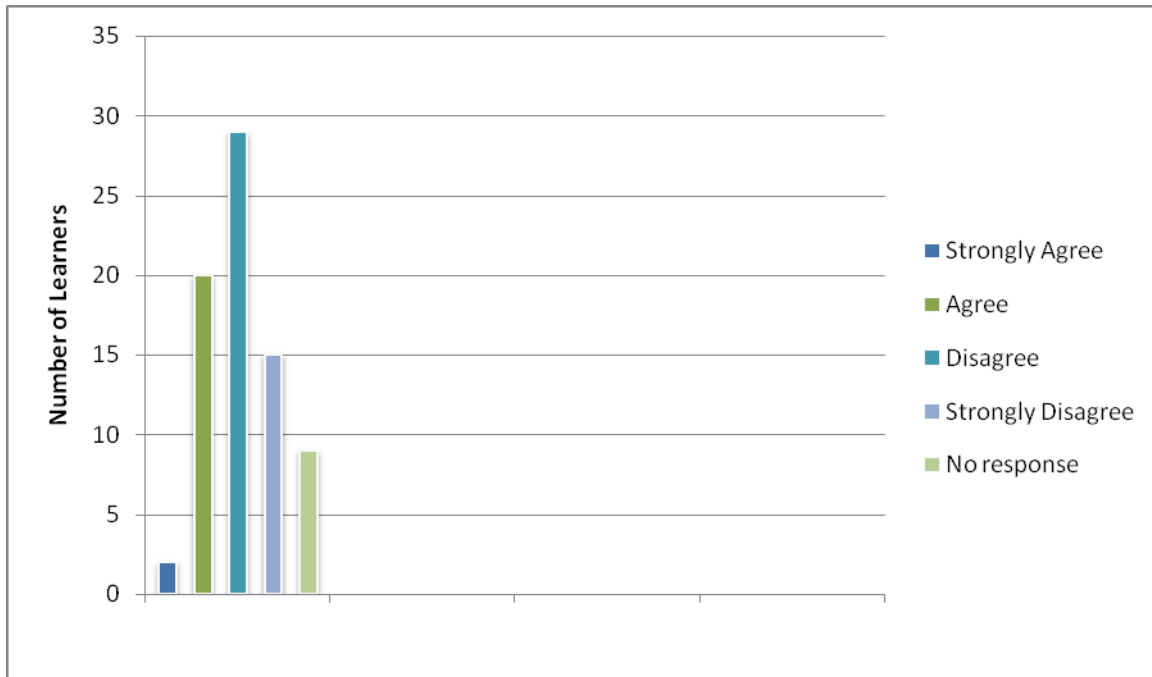


### Learner Comments:

- It was very clear – I am just slow
- The instructions were clear so I can read it
- The tutorial was cute
- Most of them were
- It took time to figure out
- Some use too many words
- I didn't understand when I read it the first time
- It was clear but I always had to go back in the test because it would not give enough time to answer and you got the answer you would not be able to put your answer in the box
- Some wording was a little difficult to understand
- Instructions were very bleak and only gave the basic idea
- A couple of questions were hard because I had no prior exposure with the subject
- The prompts were helpful in showing how to complete questions
- Yes it was very clear. The headphone part helped me a lot.
- I had no problems with it
- Perfect
- Don't understand
- Instructions didn't work – “click in box”
- Questions confusing
- Had a hard time reading them
- Some - the assessor helped me to read and understand some of the instructions



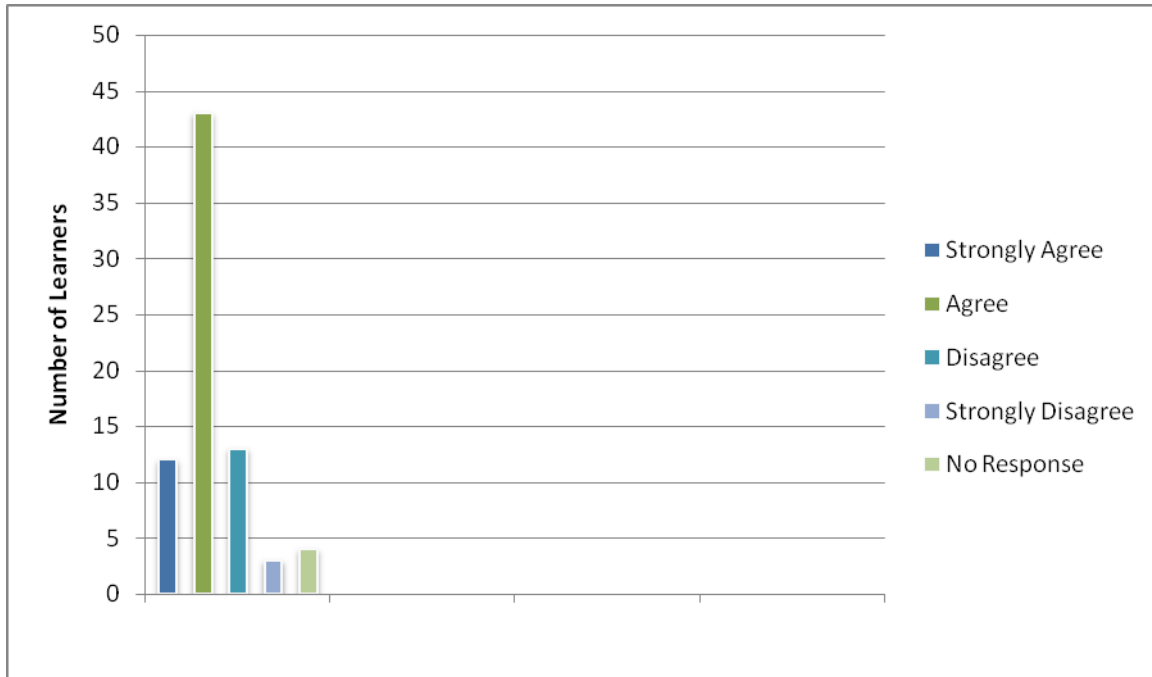
## The PDQ test is similar to other tests I've written.



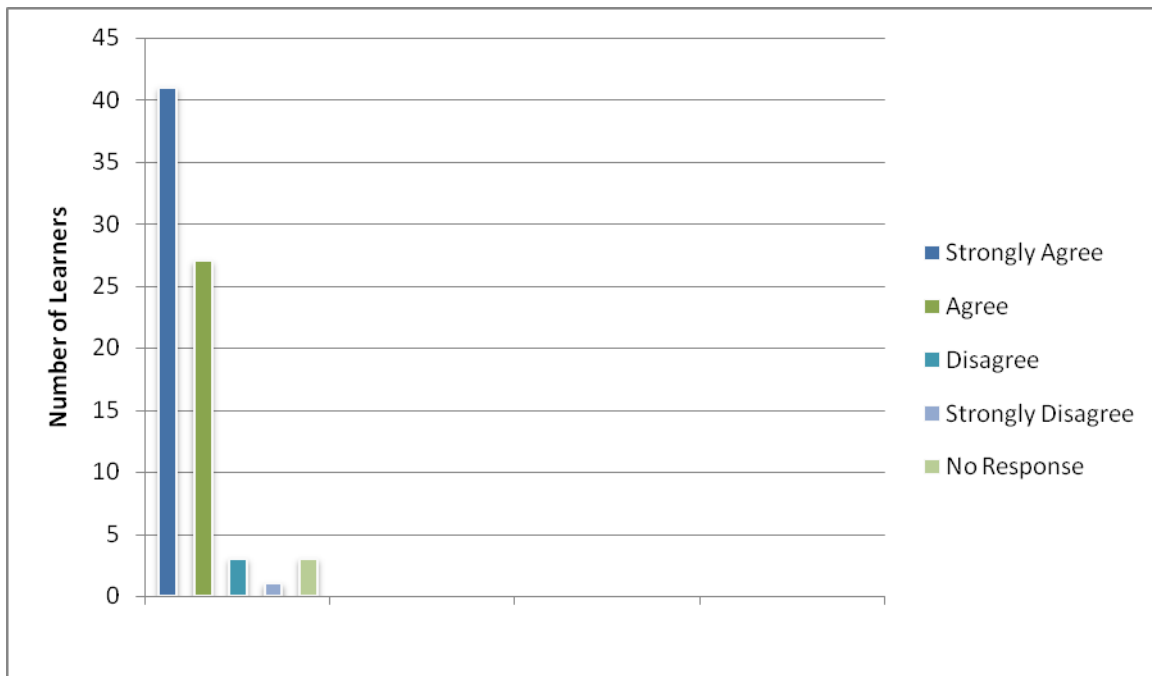
## Please list other tests that you have written that are similar to PDQ:

- Grade 10 Literacy test, Grade 3, Grade 6 testing
- Career assessment tests
- Aptitude tests, pre-GED test
- History, geo, English, math
- Grade 11 English
- The ones with the charts. Most tests are choice questions
- Just the math parts
- I took a test similar at the welfare office
- Ontario work job survey
- Night school business class
- Did PDQ test before
- The literacy class tests
- Math/science
- Multiple choice question in high school

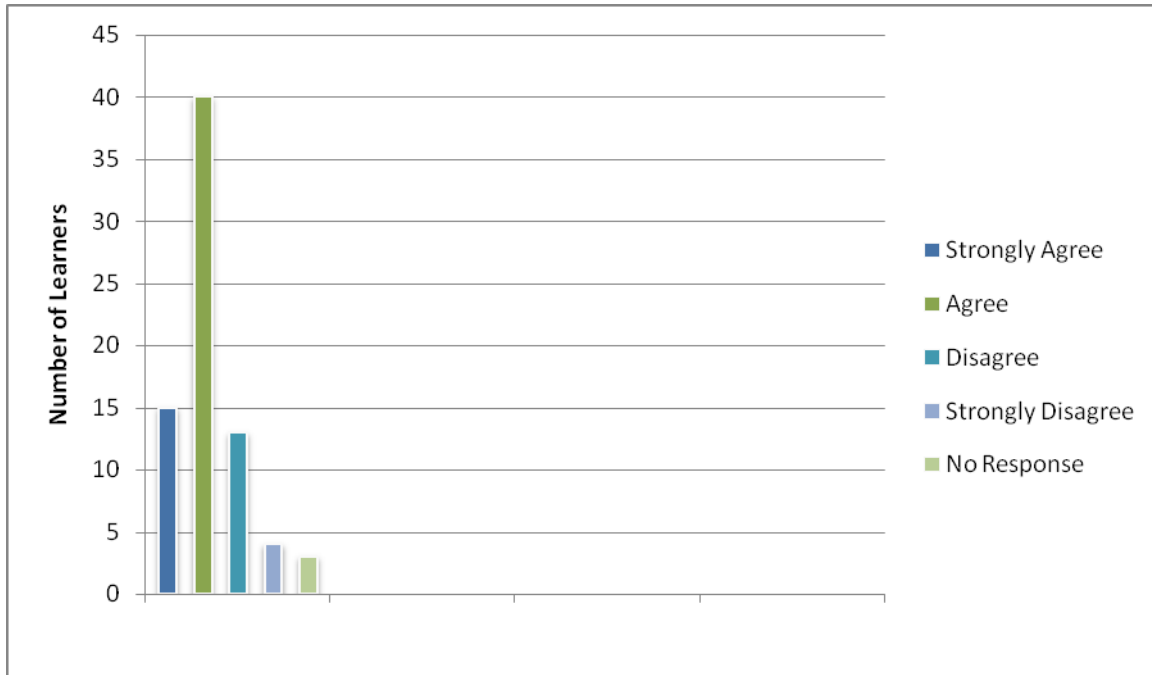
**Overall, I felt prepared to write the PDQ test.**



**I did my best to answer all the questions on the test.**



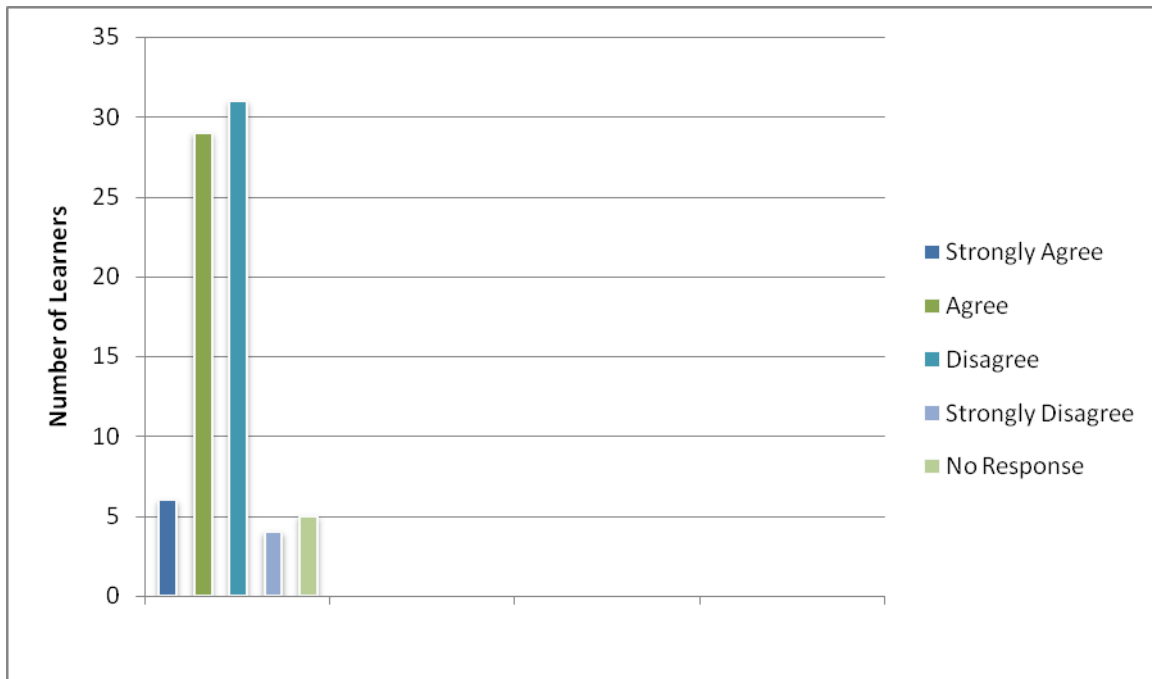
**Overall, I found the questions on the test interesting.**



**Learner Comments:**

- I feel that some of the questions were American and I feel they should have Canadian content
- Depending on the subject
- I found a lot of questions very tricky
- Some were hard
- I like new stuff
- Good range of questioning
- Some of the questions didn't use the answers on the screen
- No weird
- I thought the questions were a little too easy
- They were boring
- Some were okay but others were do difficult or boring I just wanted to move on as quick as possible
- Some were interesting
- Every question was different so I didn't find it boring
- It was a little of everything
- They sure got me thinking!
- It helps my concentration
- Not really
- Some I found very tricky
- Too complicated
- It was information I would not use at this time

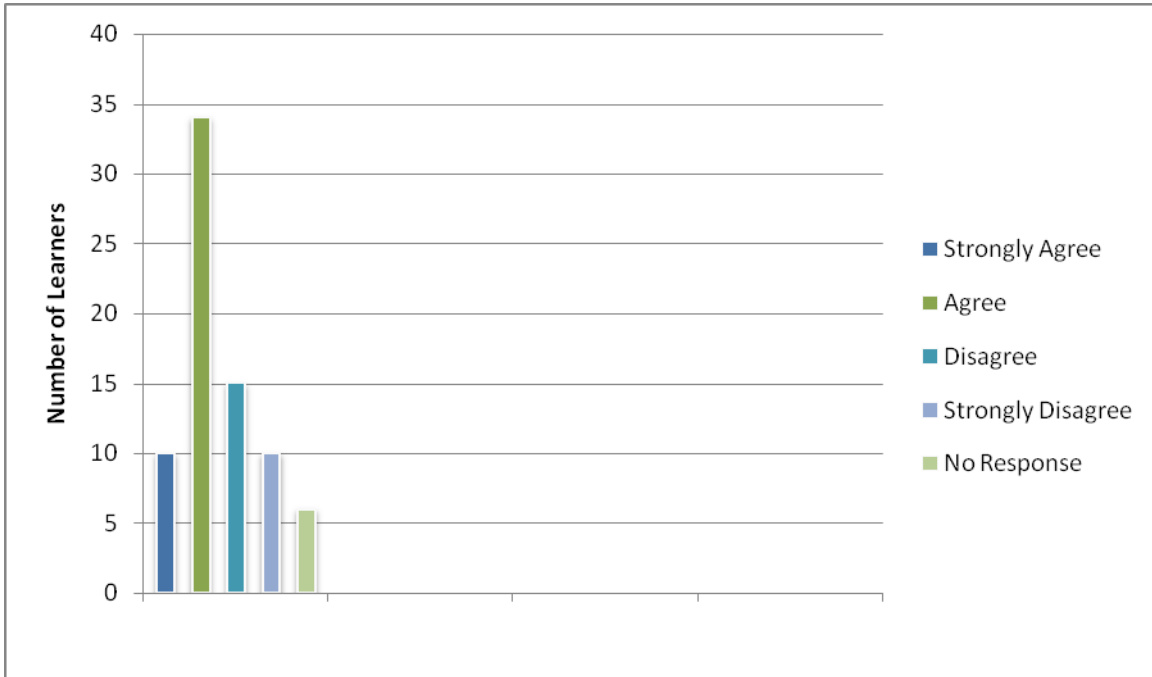
## Overall, I found the test easy.



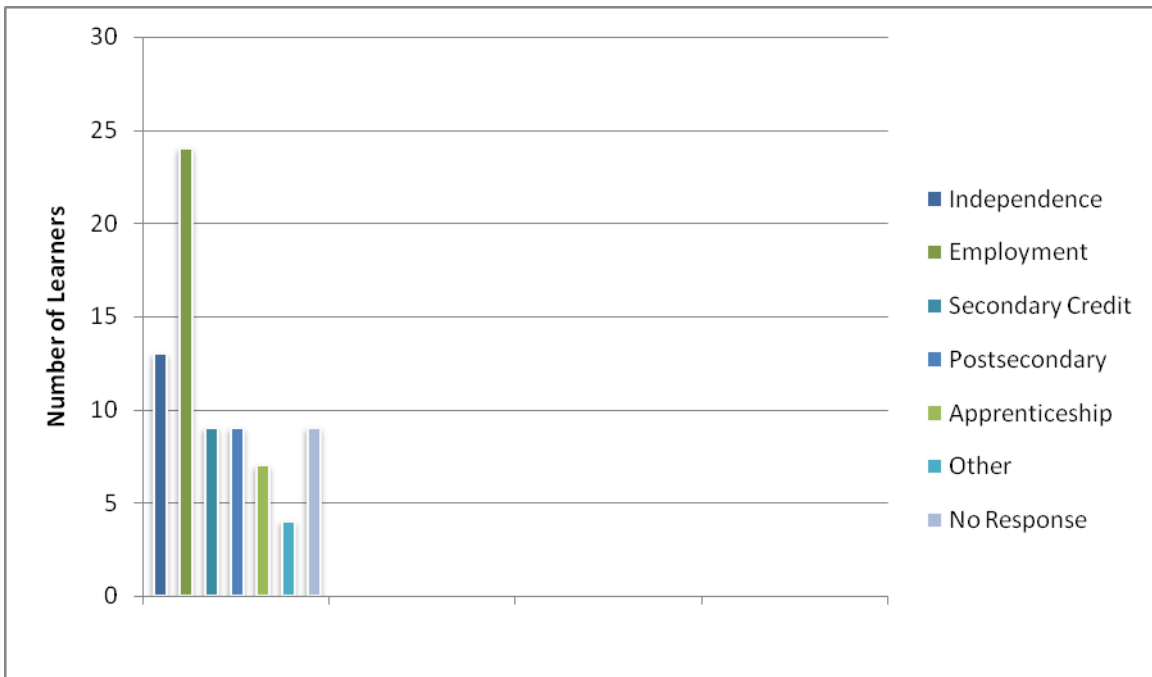
## Sampling of Learner Comments:

- Only some of the questions were difficult for me (i.e. math)
- Depending on the subject and type of question. I had trouble with the math questions
- Math a challenge, some of the charts confusing
- No I don't think it was that easy
- Some questions I had to read a couple of times or more
- Some of it was
- Too much reading on one page
- I didn't have to write anything
- I had a hard time because of my comprehension issues
- I had to think about my answers and read carefully
- I feel strongly that this test was set up to make you fail. The grammar used was not that well written which made it hard to understand the question.
- Some easy, other super hard, no in between
- Some things were unclear and it was hard to know which one to highlight
- I felt that it was tricky because the questions were similar but there was only one answer
- I found the questions well explained - a few of the questions were harder in math
- It was okay but long
- Did not have many problems
- Some questions did not know so I passed on them to the next one
- Questions unclear
- Hard questions

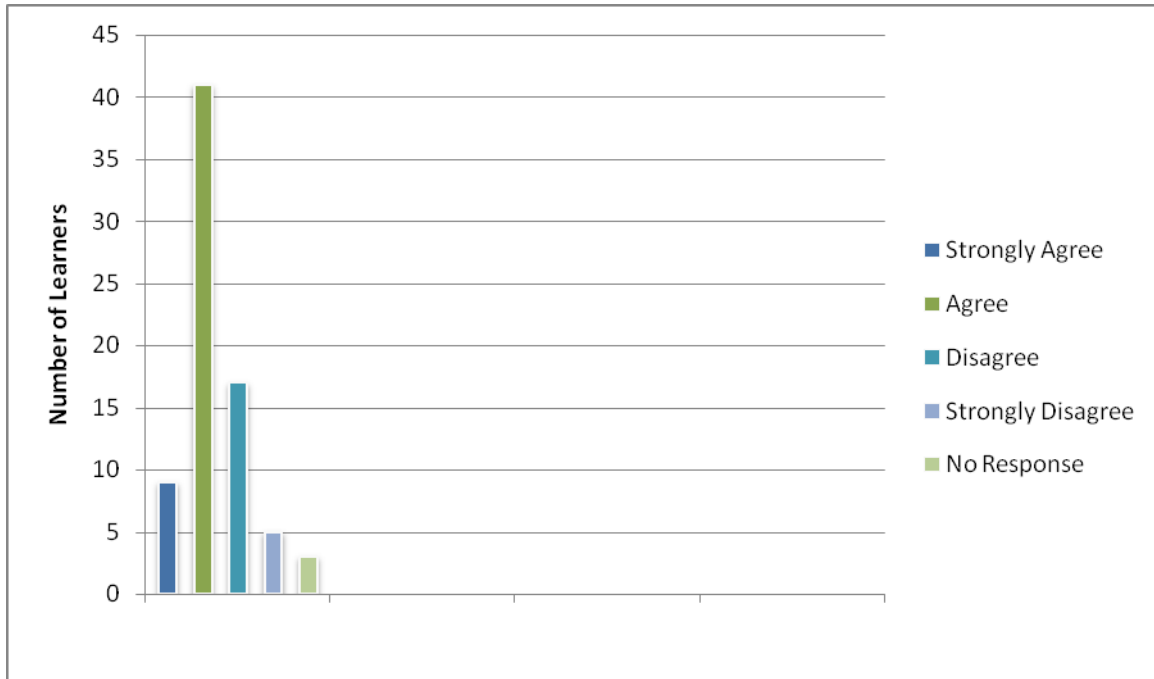
**Overall, I found the test relevant to my program goals.**



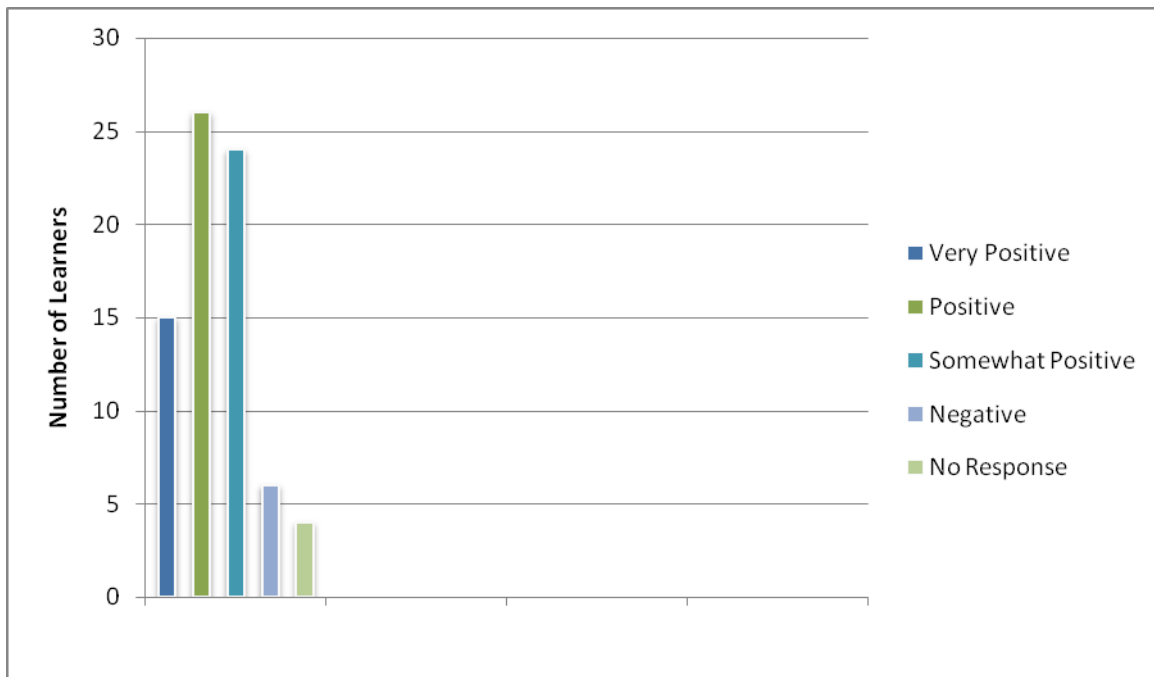
**Main Educational Goal of Learner**



**The length of the test seemed reasonable.**



**Please rate your overall experience taking the PDQ test:**



## Learner suggestions for improving the PDQ test-taking experience:

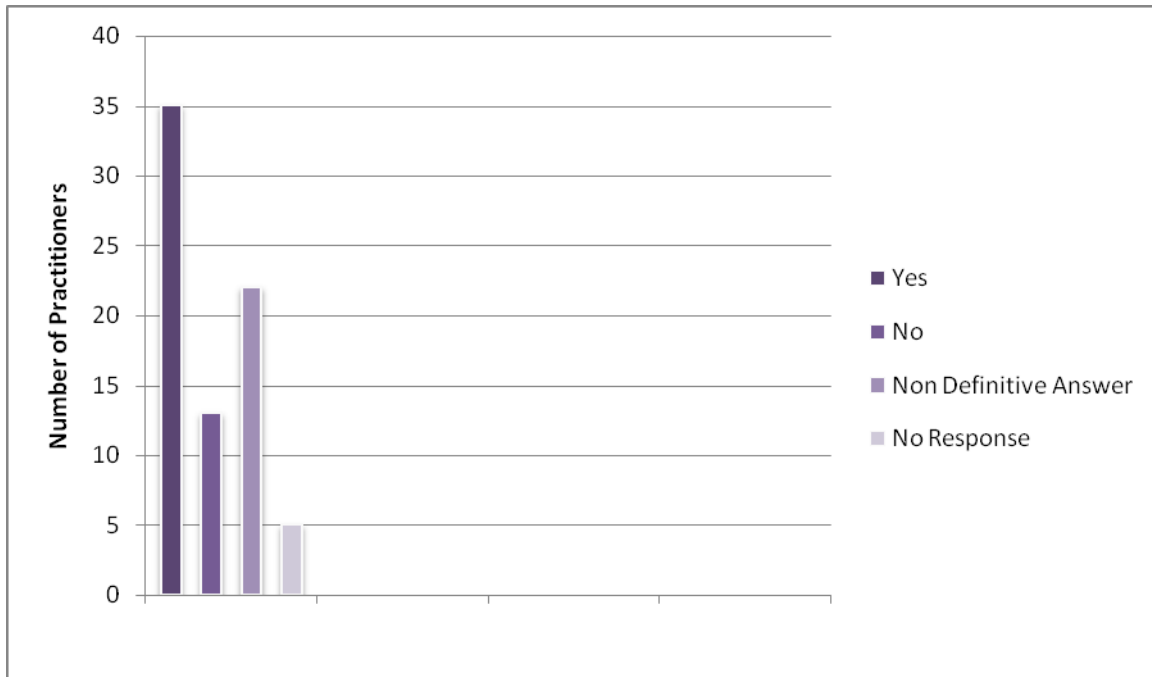
- I think that the tests should be shorter with less math questions
- I am very comfortable with using the computer - this was fun to do an assessment this way
- Had trouble highlighting answers. I felt I wasted a lot of time on them. I have never done taxes. I had trouble getting the cursor to work.
- Less math, clearer questions, better instructions
- Learn to sit and read things
- It would be nice if I had some prep time
- It was good experience- had different questions working in restaurant, nursing homes you know what kind of experience you have and skills make your job better
- If I could do it on paper I may be more relaxed
- Harder math questions
- Read more carefully, take time answering questions
- Being able to hear the paragraph or story would help. Other programs let you turn it on and off it you need it. Multiple choice questions are better
- Know more of what kind of things are one the test
- Like to have choice of answers
- Not so much reading on one page. Make more interesting
- More multiple choice questions - smaller paragraphs to read
- Don't know. Maybe try it again in a month or two
- The issue with Norton and the blocking of web pages has to be addressed and the issue of crashing of the tutorials has to be explored into and rectified
- I thought some of the questions need to be reworded for better understanding. I also think there should be more Canadian content
- I learned more about things that I didn't know like what is the signs of a heart attack
- Not to worry about rushing to finish, relax, breathe deep, re-read if you don't understand, don't get anxious if you don't understand a question
- Too many big words
- A few questions were ambiguous, answer did not appear directly in the text, would have liked Canadian content, profile score is not well explained in profile document...score was not reflective of my true level in my opinion
- I believe if I could do every test on a computer I would be okay
- Start over - use English that most people would understand
- I suggest clarifying the question and instruction half of them got jumbled up in my head making me read several times before I understood. Secondly, I would suggest that there should be less unused material jammed in there when I looked at the screen on the article and form style questions I was made to feel desperate for an answer and that it was hopeless just because it was confusing and over complicated.
- Find a way that you can go back and look at where you went wrong
- To see what got wrong - figure it out

- That I could of slowed down and not went so fast and went over the questions more careful and paid more attention to it
- Tell us what we did wrong. Show the correct answers after we have completed it.
- Maybe the test was too long?
- Would have liked a bit more time
- Please do not make it any longer!
- Shorter test
- Make it shorter and not so hard; if a person first came here and took this test, they would probably leave; some topics were stupid; a lot of it wasn't interesting; think it would be better to do tests one on one in a quiet room; sometimes it was hard to get the cursor in the right spot; there were a lot of things that didn't have anything to do with me; no scratch paper to do math.
- I think the test is interesting, not too long. Just some good thinking needed.
- Make words and text easier to read. Material easier to understand. Use plain English.
- Make test shorter -put question at my skill level
- Shorter test, choose appropriate levels, materials, make sure information is real and current, make each task shorter
- Choose different words - easier
- Make the reading easier for people to read

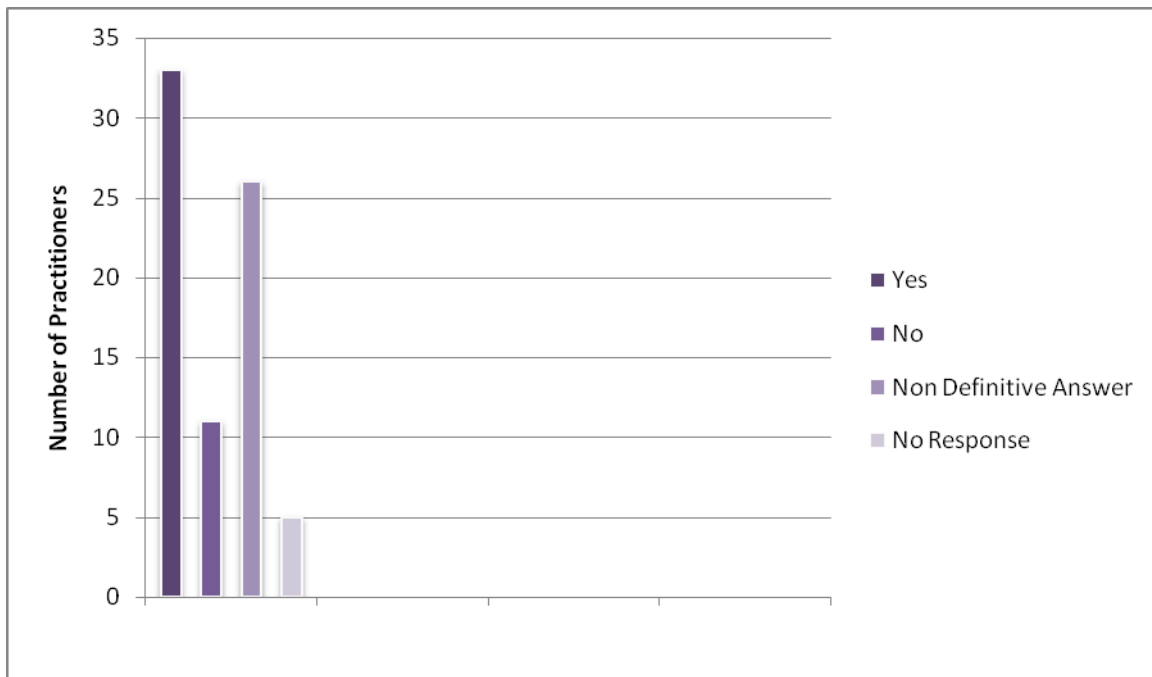


## Part B: Practitioner Feedback

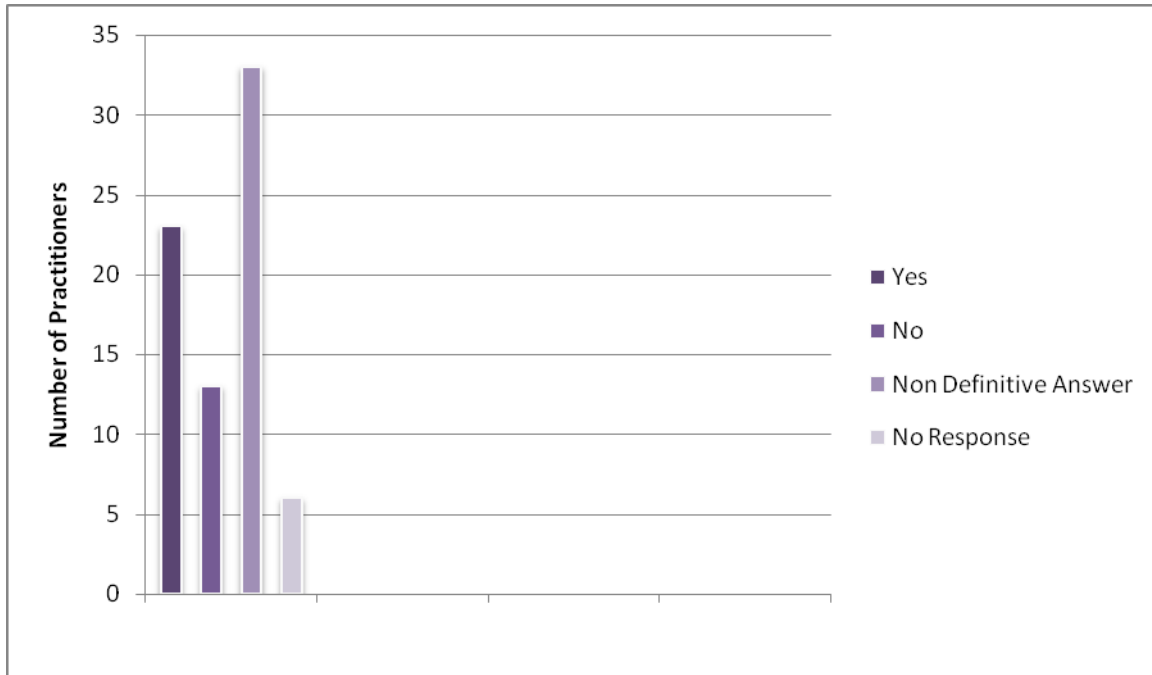
Did you feel that the skill attainment measurement indicated by the test result was valid?



Did the result compare to what your program would have assessed the learner level at?



## Were the materials used in the test relevant to the learner?

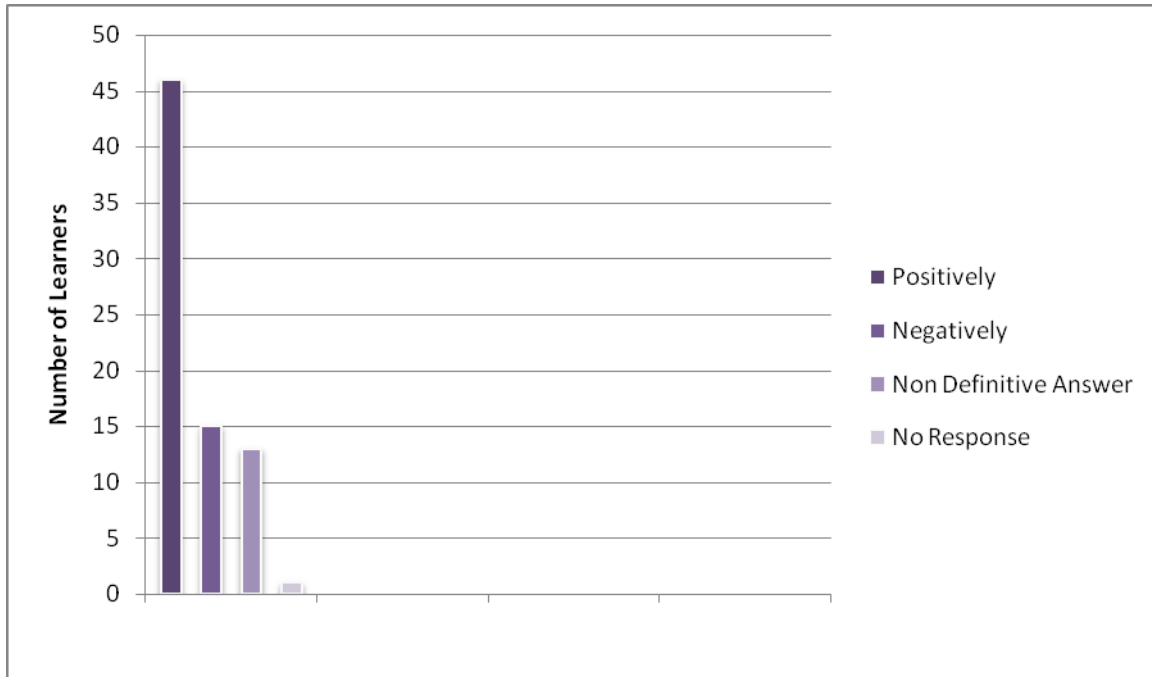


### Comments:

- She wasn't pleased with the American content because it wasn't balanced with Canadian items
- We think so - she doesn't
- Yes - health information- purchasing items
- She found them interesting, but not relevant to her program
- She didn't think so until we discussed substituting Canadian content for the charts (example: using provincial parks rather than county parks)
- Yes - menu items were mentioned
- I would think the lists and some of the other documents would be relevant
- Most of the documents
- Menus - all was familiar
- Yes - menu take out items
- Yes - everyday stuff on day-to-day basis
- Not really - this learner is totally focused on nursing or PSW prep course at the college
- Yes. The learner indicated at initial assessment that she had identified difficulty with processing information that was in long and complicated printed materials. A newspaper article is tedious but the same information presented with graphics is easier.
- The learner wasn't interested in the topics presented, especially when detailed data was included in the piece
- The quantitative literacy was easier for him but the prose section contained no relevance to his knowledge base in manufacturing and previous experience
- No, learner had very little previous experience. Manufacturing and mining are alien to him. He thought the articles were boring.

- The finance questions in the quantitative sector were of interest to the learner and his goals. Reading charts was difficult for this learner but something he wanted to work on. Large amounts of text were overwhelming but the learner said if the test was shorter it would have been okay.
- The charts and schedules were something she would encounter in her work in a greenhouse. The prose was boring.
- No, some of the topics were out of her realm of experience like the charts and graphs.
- Some were. She understood and related to the pizza questions and the parks schedule working in food service prior to program. Totally uninterested in the ecology.
- Yes - exercise on ecology of interest to this learner - graphs and charts were challenging.
- She disagreed that the test was relevant to her program goals. She said it was inappropriate to use so much American content.
- She didn't express an opinion when asked about the relevancy of the material but remarked that relevancy wasn't an issue for her.
- He thought the material was excellent and relevant although it included too much American content
- There were many questions that the learner started to look at but went on to the next as she felt it did not apply to her situation
- The learner felt they were related to real-life situations (i.e., mortgages)
- The learner found some of the questions out of his realm
- The learner did not answer specific questions (i.e., air conditioner in car) because she is not the driver. Not all questions were relevant to her given situation in life.
- The learner indicated the material used in the assessment was not relevant to her...e.g., too little Canadian content
- He said *no* but essential skills used are the same
- Wording of some material was too hard and learner didn't understand
- Yes - the transferable skills needed for reading and understanding as well as finding specific information
- Not really because he's going into trucking but some transferable skills applied with the reading and understanding skills
- Yes - transferable skills
- Yes - same type of essential skills were used
- Yes, shopping, cooking activities she does in family and work life
- Not really - nothing really for the hip young crowd, it seems
- Learner would have been familiar with many but some not in realm of experience
- Medical pieces on health of particular interest - not all in learner's experience
- Not all!
- Many too complex and not in the realm of experience of our learners
- Some yes, some no
- Yes - experienced with all this documentation
- They were not things he has to deal with (yet) or has been exposed to in his life
- The math part was relevant to the learner. Some of the stories used words that were too big/difficult. Some of the topics did not relate to the learner's world.
- Some of the schedules and graphs were important for the learner to understand

## How did the learner respond to the test-taking process?



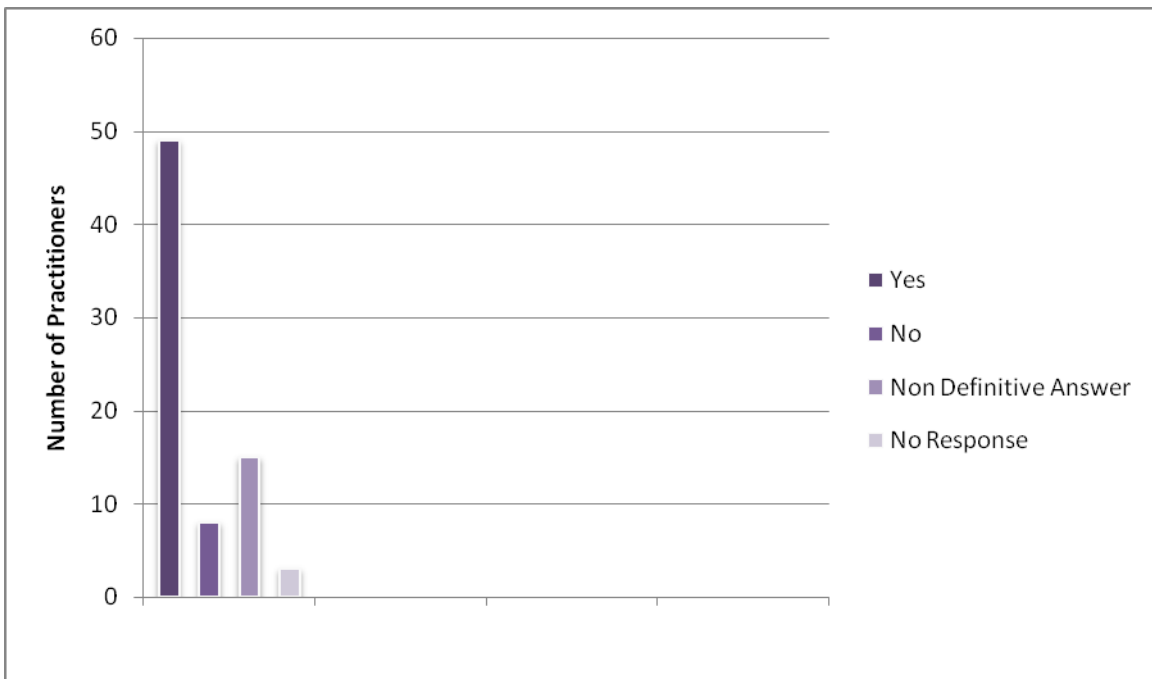
## How did the learner respond to the test content?

- Okay - no problems
- Openly
- Has a block when there are numbers in a question
- Positively (x 10 responses)
- No problems - moved right through
- Kept a list of test items she found could have been improved
- She found some of the charts and graphs challenging but was willing to try
- Too much American content and too many examples not relevant to her
- She seemed quite interested
- She was not engaged
- He found the whole process stressful
- He expressed an interest and awareness of its validity
- Seemed engaged
- It didn't seem to pertain to her but it was practice
- She was comfortable with the content
- She would have preferred the 30-question segment to be broken into two 15 question segments. It seemed long.
- He was interested but was aware that he was taking a long time to answer the questions

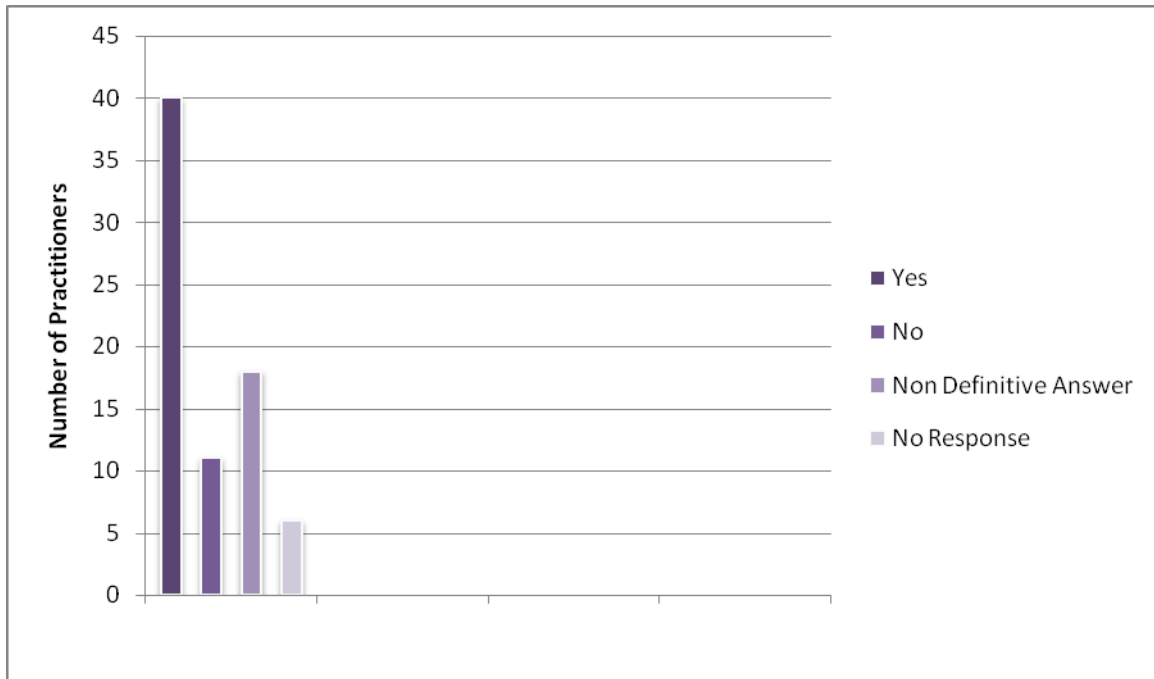
- Overwhelmed - would have preferred a section a day
- Some of it was boring, especially the longer prose. His responses were mechanical. He did not pick up on contextual clues.
- The prose was boring
- She couldn't understand what some of the questions were meant to show
- The content was too hard to find - she had to read the whole passage for information and she didn't like it
- The content was secondary to the ease of use of the program. He found the material interesting
- She stated she was bored with it
- Positive feedback about the assessment and remarked that the questions were very clear
- The learner became very frustrated as the questions became more complex throughout the assessment
- It was ok for her
- The learner made an attempt to respond to all the questions but he took his time. He was frustrated with questions for which he could not provide a response. Questions that were beyond his level left him very annoyed and frustrated with himself
- This learner did not like the content as some questions presented unfamiliar material, irrelevant to her situation
- This learner also commented that the assessment's content contained too much American content and was not particularly relevant to her
- Sometimes boring content
- Negative
- He felt it was not written in clear language
- Overwhelmed
- Comfortable
- Felt comfortable
- Was okay
- Little difficult
- Frustrated with Internet not working properly at library location
- No big response
- Found it easy
- Very anxious
- Well
- Was fine with it
- Hated it
- Very methodically - rereading everything
- Rushed through it
- Found some of test daunting in terms of content
- Fine -graph frustrating due to lack of understanding
- Extremely frustrated with some questions that not in realm of learner's experience

- Some content not in realm of experience and needed support
- Worked quietly and diligently - slowly taking the time to review questions
- Worked diligently at it
- Responded “Oh boy” to new questions when they saw dense content
- Frustrated - could see back and next buttons - content of reading pieces dense; print too small
- Seems frustrated by tutorial; too slow-said test was too congested - print too small; too much text in some questions
- He found some of it hard to read and understand
- He didn’t realize it was a test
- Felt it did not pertain to her
- Was curious, said he learned
- Couldn't see relevance for most of it
- Liked learning new subjects, liked using the computer, liked trying the math
- He felt that a lot of the material on the test was too high
- The learner felt the test content was too difficult

**Did the learner seem motivated and engaged?**



**Do the materials (e.g., recipes, schedules, graph) used in the test seem realistic or authentic to the learner?**



**How well did the learner handle the complexity of the test?**

- By having three sessions, it was less overwhelming
- Not frustrated but identified this as a challenge.
- Ok
- Although she was relieved to know that she could skip items, she did read everything thoroughly before making the decision to skip more complex items
- Better than expected
- Well; she expected to do well
- Well - no complaints
- Well (x 3 responses)
- Not well (x 2 responses)
- Seemed to do well
- Quite well
- Very well - tends to be a little over confident
- Very well (x 5 responses)
- Well - no problems
- She welcomed the challenge as test taking is her downfall
- She got frustrated by the prose section and would have liked to return and redo a section after she had exited

- At first he was frustrated because of the time it took him, but relaxed when the instructor explained there was no time limit
- The learner shared that it got more difficult as each section passed. The third section should have been first when he was fresh
- He just kept working
- She just answered as best as she could understand
- She questioned why she needed to be able to read graphs when she could find out the information another way - i.e. ask someone
- She applied her manual learning strategies to the computer, like reading the question out loud and highlighting areas so she didn't lose her place
- He had difficulty remembering detail and had to reread the longer exercises several times
- She seemed relaxed and did her best although she struggled the questions involving math skills
- Learner became frustrated and wanted the assessment to end
- If questions were too long, she tended to skip them
- He tackled as much as he could
- The learner became quite frustrated with the use of large words and the complexity of the questions
- Handled the complexity of the assessment well
- Ok, but felt she was rushed through
- Negative
- Confused
- Very unsure of herself
- Found it difficult to understand what was being asked
- Little difficult
- A little tricky at times with the wording of the questions
- Tried to keep up
- Anxious
- No problem
- Questionable - may have guessed at times
- Not very well
- See results
- Was overly careful
- Says he did ok but I feel he rushed through a lot of it
- Found some questions daunting in terms of content
- Frustrated by what was required on graphs and charts
- Commented that some text too long; large and small print - had to review a couple more than once to locate answer
- Didn't always understand what was being asked
- Quietly and worked diligently - took time
- A lot of "Oh Gosh" when the next questions opened and the learners saw the amount of text and small print

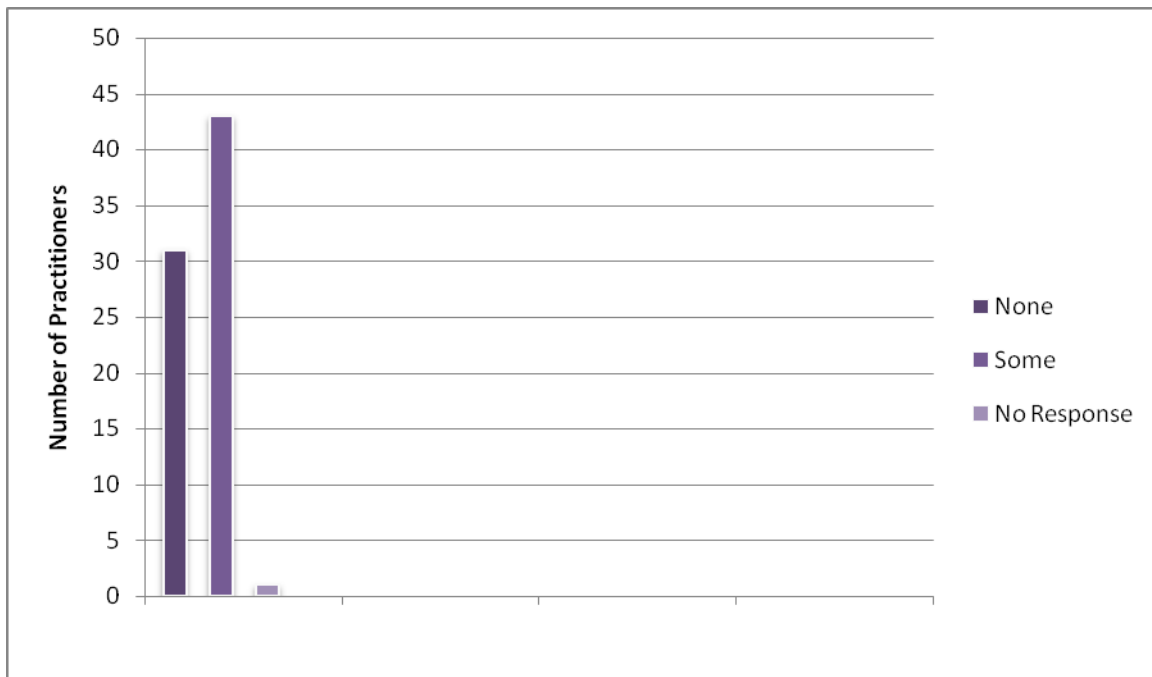


- Said “Oh boy” - then set about scanning materials for answers
- Found reading too small (text)
- Text too congested and print too small
- He found it too hard at times due to the types of questions and amount of info he had to read to gain the answers
- He didn't understand most of the test
- She could do it but she was getting very frustrated
- Too complex for independent work
- It was far too complex, even with assistance
- Had help from assessor
- The learner persevered, no matter how difficult parts of the test were
- The learner tried to stay focused and remained calm throughout the entire test

**What kind of support was the learner given (e.g., calculator, blank paper)?**

- Most learners were given blank paper and a pencil. Some learners were also given a calculator and a dictionary.

**How much assistance did the learner ask for?**

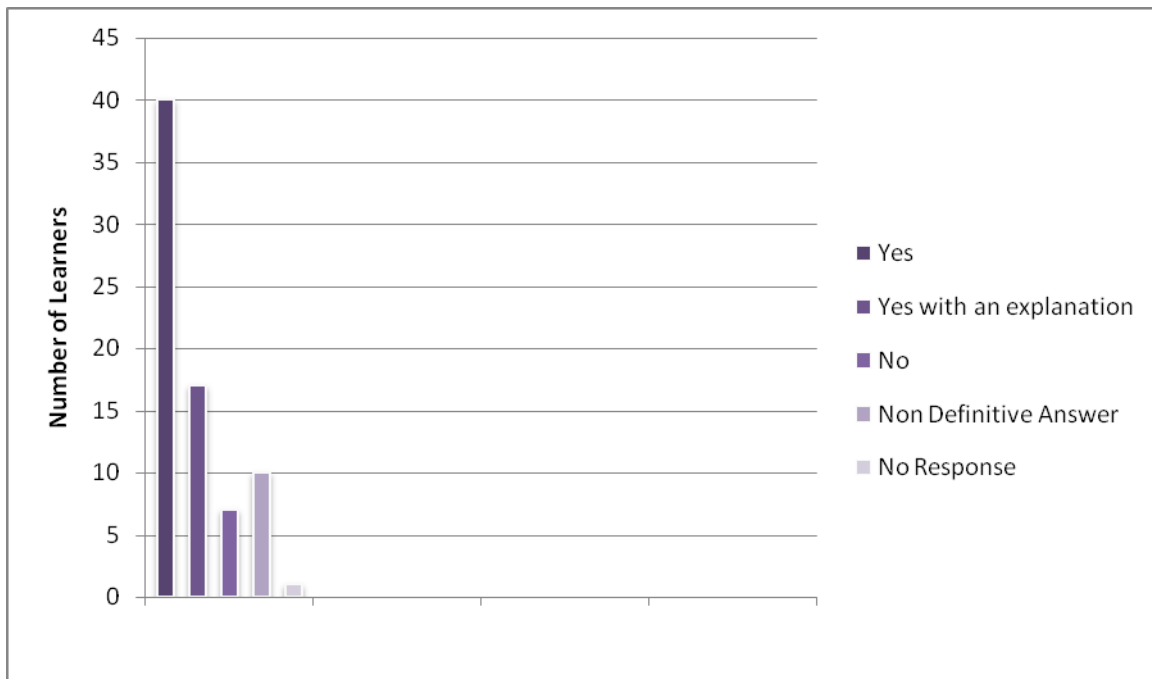


## What kind of assistance did the learner ask for?

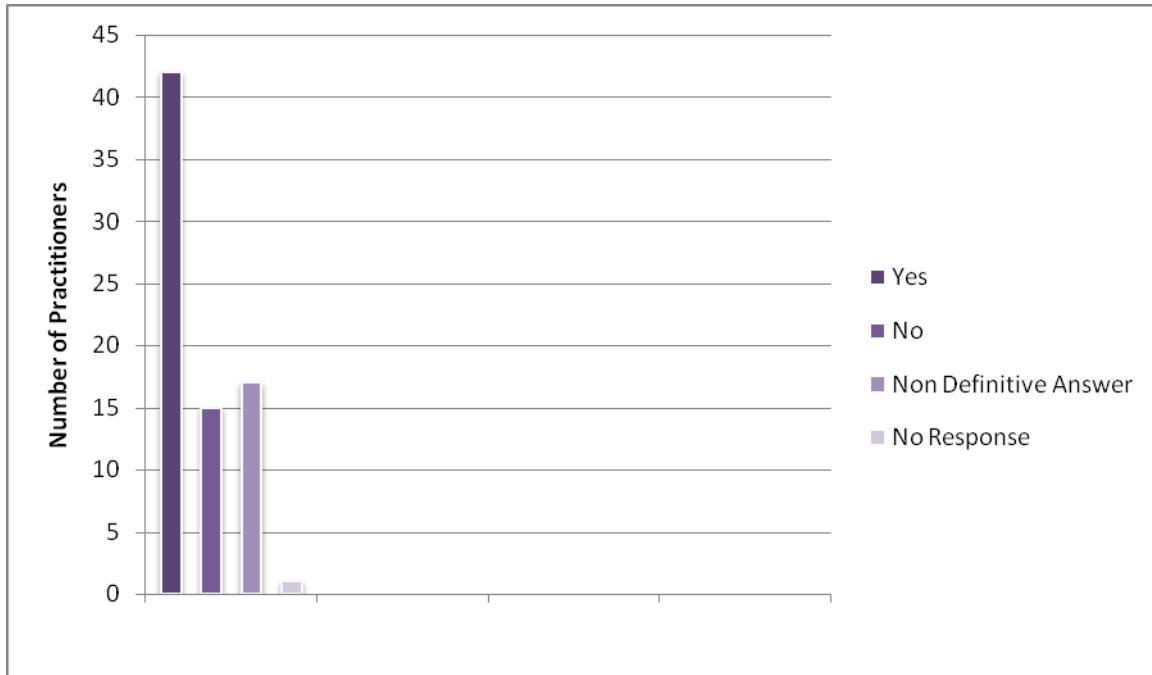
- Explain what was being asked of her
- To have some clarification as to what was being asked of her
- Needed to know what was being asked of her
- She requested clarification of several questions she found were not clearly written
- Computer issues
- None - computer issues
- She needed clarification on several questions
- Could he skip a question?
- Asked for help with what information the question was asking
- He wanted to know if instructor could override or undo so he could fix an answer
- On the clarification questions, she was encouraged to read the instructions again and redo that part of the tutorial
- Clarification on questions. She was told to re-read the questions
- She requested assistance with blocking or highlighting text
- Stressed but relaxed when assured she could take her time - felt it should be called an assessment, not a test
- Clarification on questions
- A technical question only
- "Am I doing this right?"
- Verbal
- She requested clarification of a few questions she felt were unclear
- Verification on what the question was asking and understanding of words
- Verification of meanings of words and questions being asked
- Verification of questions throughout test or about specific works
- Some questions, when he didn't know what the question was asking
- Verification of meanings of questions and words
- Occasional question
- Few questions
- Checking in boxes proved difficult for all, including this learner
- Reading these documents for understanding
- Very little - clicking in boxes took several attempts to get cursor
- For clarity of understanding as English is not first language
- Help to get into boxes and highlighting
- Not much
- Very little - worked fairly independently - trouble clicking in boxes
- Help to click into answer boxes
- Computer skills assistance
- Some math and mainly reading longer text
- Reading help, using the mouse, understanding the content

- Some of her questioning was around things she hadn't been taught so I couldn't really help her without showing her the answer
- Occasional word, explanation re: graph and refrigerator chart
- Explanation of graphs, charts, some terms, most of the vocabulary, how to highlight
- Reading and understanding
- Needed assistance with understanding some of the questions
- The learner needed a lot of help reading

**Was the learner able to understand the test results the report provided?**



## Did the learner find the report useful?



### Comments:

- Yes - as an initial assessment
- Interesting rather than useful
- It helped identify a level and a starting point
- I think so - the things he should work on make sense
- Yes - the practice ideas were a special feature. She asked for more activities of that nature
- Yes, she felt more confident about her skills in math and liked the specific skills to strengthen
- Yes, very - it affirmed his direction and goals
- Yes - liked the program to tell him what was next and the big long list of things he could do – his "current skills"
- Yes, she liked the suggestions for specific areas to work on
- Yes - she like the skills breakdown and suggestions and ideas for other tasks to work on
- Yes - particularly the suggestions and ideas on skills to strengthen. He said he liked the specific types of tasks suggested
- Yes - to see what she still needs to work on
- She found it emphasized what she already knew her gaps to be
- Yes - it is a tangible affirmation of current skills
- Yes, to a degree - bar graphs might have been useful
- Like doing it - what they could practice - learner liked this
- No, not really reflective of skills
- Learner said it was useful because it told her what she needed to work on - didn't agree with some of the areas she needed to strengthen
- No, the report did not mean anything to the learner

### Additional Practitioner Comments about PDQ Testing:

- Learner was comfortable with the computer
- This was the most difficult because of computer issues but the learner kept coming back
- This learner volunteered to take this test. She was keenly interested in a tangible level 0-500 as opposed to LBS level 3. She cannot relate to LBS levels. She would like to take similar tests at a later date and as a result of the assessment has requested additional instruction to get up to speed. The whole report, with its breakdowns, totally appealed to this learner.
- This learner would have liked to have repeated this assessment in a month. She is eager to begin on specific skills
- This learner was concerned about how long it took to do the test but his limits were self-imposed. When we discussed the results, he was pleasantly surprised that the results verified what his instructors have been telling him. He liked the breakdown of "skills to strengthen" and "skills to build in the future." He said it made him feel like he didn't have to do it all at once. He would like to do it again later.
- This learner is slow and methodical in everything he does and says. He did comment that it would have been easier if he had a choice of audio in the more difficult passages like in the tutorial.
- The learner liked "current skills" details as well as "skills to strengthen" ideas. No writing was a good thing. And the program never told him he was wrong.
- She wanted a copy so she could work on the "skills to strengthen" and she also liked the check marked practice ideas
- This learner agreed to try the test as long as there was no writing. She balked at the survey after the test because she'd had enough. This learner often goes away when encountering difficulty and then comes back when she has had time to process. Would be willing to try another test.
- This learner was nervous and uses repetition to understand most things. I noticed that she did the same thing with the computer. Also, she was able to answer the question more easily when she spoke it out loud. She was disappointed that there was not an audio choice button if she needed it.
- This learner requested to be one of the people tested again. He also asked for the instructor to provide materials to study from the suggestions.
- This learner would have felt more comfortable reading the questions from a paper copy. She preferred written answers (use of proper grammar) as opposed to multiple choice or "Pick one of the above."
- This learner is one that is taking the test a second time.
- He seemed very negative towards this type of assessing but I thought if we gave it another try with more explanation, it would make a difference. It didn't.
- Learner thinks maybe if some questions on the evaluation would have been asked on a rating scale instead, it would have made more sense and simplified the outcome of what they were evaluating.
- Learner would like to know where they went wrong and have it at least explained.

- Wanted to see where they went wrong and with it being computerized, I couldn't explain or see where mistakes were made.
- All clients want to see or know where they went wrong and I wasn't able to explain without seeing the test.
- Client found the PDQ non-threatening and enjoyed it.
- Test like this would have destroyed client at intake session!
- Because this learner is such a "plodder," the PDQ is a terrible test for him and for the instructor. Very stressful for both parties as you can see - not productive use of anyone's time!
- Some of the exercises were good, however most were too difficult re reading level for the learners that are below a level 3.
- Test too long - too many areas being tested at one time. Test too difficult. A lot of the samples were not relevant to the learner. Material too Americanized. I didn't know if this learner would come back to finish the test.
- Computer issues - learner commented that spending that much time on a computer made his eyes water and it was more difficult to read than paper text.
- American bias - if we had been able to give a few questions for about 30 minutes each lesson/week, the learner would not have been so fatigued. With so much material to cover, at the end perhaps we rushed - the learner viewed this as interesting learning as opposed to testing.
- This material might be better as a teaching aid, rather than a test. Level too difficult for learner to do on their own. As the material became more difficult, the learner stopped worrying about it being a test and began to enjoy the learning process.

## Part C: Logistical Statistics

- Average amount of practitioner time per PDQ test: 190 minutes
- Average cost to administer each PDQ test: \$66.59
- Average length of time for a learner to complete PDQ: 142 minutes
- Average number of sittings to complete PDQ: 1.63
- Percentage of learners that needed to be monitored during test-taking process: 21.6%

## Part D: Overall Agency Feedback

### 1. Purpose of the Test

<b>Is the purpose of the test clearly stated?</b>
Yes.
Yes.
I believe so.
Yes, it is precise and methodical. I had no further questions after reading the explanation.
Yes.
Yes, the purpose of the test was clearly stated.

### 2. Accessibility of the Test

<b>How easy was it for the learners to access the test?</b>
Very easy. It should be noted that the test/assessment could have been improved in terms of learner's ability to highlight/block text – The learner's access to perform this function was not consistent throughout the test. At times, the learner could use his/her mouse to drag over and select appropriate text; at other times, learner needed to click on individual words to select words in his/her answer.
A simple process. Once the practitioner sat with each learner for the initial log-in, learners found it easy to access the site a second or third time.
It was very, very easy. Some learners had difficulty restarting when the Internet failed but generally it was easy.
Yes, very easy. For those who chose to do it in two sessions, they had no difficulty and they liked that the program went directly to where they left it.
Very easy except we could not get it to work on Vista; it would not even open the web site.
It was very easy for the learners to access the test. The instructions were clear and easy to follow. There were no problems starting the test. When the learners wanted to take a break, it was not difficult to get back to where they had left off.

### 3. Test Preparation for Learners

<b>How well does the tutorial prepare learners?</b>
At this particular screen resolution, on a 21-inch flat screen, you could not clearly see the BACK and NEXT buttons. Only the top edges of the buttons were visible, including HELP and REVIEW buttons.
The tutorial could have included an alert to learners that they could not proceed to the test portion of the assessment without first responding to every question in the tutorial. An “opt out” option during the tutorial could have been included for learners wishing to proceed beyond the tutorial but not prepared to respond to each question in the tutorial.
All our learners used the tutorial prior to taking the test. It did provide a “settling in” period for many. A few, with more advanced computer skills, found it frustrating when they couldn’t get out of the tutorial after starting it. The highlighting feature is a little “sticky.” At times, two or three attempts had to be made to be successful.
I felt it prepared them very well. A few more practice questions might be good.
Very well, however most felt that they would have liked the option to skip sections and others wanted to revisit and access a particular section while taking the test. The tutorial froze up in two spots and they didn’t like having to start from the beginning.
It was okay except it didn’t explain certain selection methods, such as when selecting a sentence, did you include all punctuation, and when selecting two or more words, did you include the word <i>and</i> in your highlighting?
This question cannot be answered. None of the learners that were being supervised went through the tutorial.



#### 4. Administration of Test

<b>What is involved in administering the test?</b>
There were several learners to whom the test was administered who did not have basic knowledge of computers (keyboard, mousing skills, right, left, single and double-clicking). We need to do two lessons, on two consecutive days, prior to doing the tutorial.
Lead practitioner sets up the screen to the appropriate website for learner and enters the authorization code for learner. Learner sets up his/her profile. Lead practitioner sits with learner through the tutorial and first few questions of the assessment to ensure learner's comfort level with the assessment and the technology. Depending on the learner, the lead practitioner exits from the room and remains available upon request from learner for technical assistance, clarification, etc.  When the learner completes the assessment, the lead practitioner prints it off. Lead practitioner reviews the test results with the learner and responds to any questions the learner may have.  Learner then completes his/her learner evaluation form independently with the lead practitioner close by, and available for assistance or clarification if required, while lead practitioner completes the lead practitioner's evaluation form for each learner and enters appropriate info in the Authorization Summary Code sheet.
Students were selected and asked to do the test based on their reading and computer capability. The rest just flowed through with some staff support.
Presenting the purpose of the test along with the expectations of what will be demonstrated. The procedures involved were discussed – i.e., tutorial first, then test, then survey, then discussion of results.
The learners were asked if they would like to do a test. They were explained some of the details. They were given a scrap paper, pencil, and a calculator as tools to help them during the test. It was stressed that they were to take as much time as they needed and to ask a staff member if any instructions were unclear and required further communication.

<b>Is a documented process/protocol in place?</b>
The PDQ process guide detailed the protocol.
Yes.
No.
Yes, the PDQ Profile Series User Guide is very clear and concise.
No. We just developed an “understanding” of a process without writing it out.
The learners that were doing the test were given their access number.

<b>Is training for administering the test required?</b>
No. Not clear where to provide this feedback, but I feel strongly about the fact lead practitioners have been asked to compare the PDQ assessment results to the LBS (Literacy and Basic Skills) levels we use without a comparison on the two different measurements provided.
No, reading through the User Guide and trying the test are adequate preparation.
No, I don't believe so.
No, the instructions for the administrator were very clear. The language use in the results was familiar and consistent with Demonstrations Ontario and Alpha Route language.
No, but some written info about the quirks as commented on the first part of #4 would be useful.
Training for administering the test was not required.

## 5. Test Security

<b>Do you feel that the test instrument is secure?</b>
Yes, it is anonymous and password protected.
Yes.
Yes.
Yes. One student transposed a number while trying to re-enter the test and was denied access.
Yes.
Yes, the test instrument is secure.

## 6. Duration

<b>Is an adequate amount of time given to complete the test?</b>
Yes.
Yes. The option of going in and out is an asset, particularly for those coming in part-time with other jobs to go to.
Yes, there did not seem to be a time limit. If there was, we never reached it.
Yes. The average length of time for the tutorial was one hour and for the actual test, two hours. Learners would prefer to have done the section with 30 questions first when they were fresh and all agreed it was too long. Most opted to “get it over with” in one session instead of two.
Yes.
The learners were asked to take their time to complete the test. If they were getting too tired, frustrated or upset, they were asked to take a break and return to the test when they were ready. Some learners finished the test in 1.5 hours while others took six hours. Some of the computers were giving the learners difficulties, which is why it took them longer to complete the test.

## 7. Test Design

<b>Are the instructions to learners clear and complete? Print, layout, graphics – are they clear?</b>
<p>Too much information presented without sufficient use of white space...this overload of information and text can be intimidating and overwhelming to any learner and even more so to a learner with low literacy skills. More white space in the “test” layout and design would be highly recommended.</p> <p>These additional comments do not relate to “test design” but rather to test content.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The test included content using American examples and was therefore, less relevant for Canadian learners.</li><li>• The test could have included examples that were not as urban-based...i.e., examples using the outdoor activity (fishing, hunting, etc.) would have provided some relevant content to someone who doesn’t own a home or have a mortgage or frequent restaurants (eat in or take out). One of our Aboriginal learners remarked that the questions in the assessment included too little culturally appropriate content for someone of his background and circumstances.</li></ul>
Yes, they seemed quite clear. I had no complaints.
Yes, they are very clear and similar to other activities that the learners have seen in paper form. The comfort level of the learners increased after a few exercises.
Some learners felt the language and layout were too complicated and not clear. For example, the language level was too high for low level learners.
Yes, the instructions to the learners were clear and complete. The print, layout, and graphics were all clear.

## 8. Language

<b>Is the language familiar and consistent?</b>
Some of the language was overwhelming for learners with low literacy skills. Additionally, the language is inconsistent immediately from the get go. Is this an assessment or a test? There are too many references to both and I feel, as some of our learners indicated, that it would work better if “assessment” was used consistently rather than “test.”
Yes.
Yes.
Yes and no, depending on the level of learners. LBS level 4 & 5 learners had little difficulty. LBS level 1 & 2 did have trouble. LBS level 3 – mixed.
No, the language was not always familiar to the learners. However, it did seem to be consistent throughout the test.

<b>Is the language it at an appropriate level?</b>
Yes.
Yes. I was particularly interested in this. How did PDQ compare to manual assessment and would it be useful for a level 1?
No.
No, the test was not at an appropriate level for the learners in our program. Most of the learners in our program are at a level 1 or level 2. It seemed as if the test would have been appropriate for a level 3 or even level 4 learner.

## 9. Bias

<b>Is the test free from bias?</b>
The test was not free from bias...clearly; urban learners had a distinct advantage as opposed to learners from less urban areas. Additionally, examples should have included Canadian content, rather than American examples.
I did not perceive any bias.
Yes.
Yes.
Yes, the test was free from bias.

<b>Is the test culturally appropriate and gender balanced?</b>
No...we have one Aboriginal learner who felt it in no way included any culturally appropriate content relevant to him.
Several of our learners were concerned about the lack of Canadian content used – i.e., the list of parks (American).
Yes.
I didn't find evidence of any inappropriate or biased material in any of the questions.
Yes.
Yes, the test was culturally appropriate and gender balanced.

## 10. Program Content/Instructional Strategies

<b>Did the materials relate to current programming and curriculum at the agency? Please give examples.</b>
Most of the material used was at a much higher level than what many of our learners are accustomed to at our agency.
For the most part. We do try to use real documents such as menus, charts and brochures.
Very appropriate and similar to hard copy activities in use – i.e., Work write, CABS
Yes, depending on the clients. Some would be able to tell you how the materials relate. Lower level clients could not but would understand after some explanation and see how some skills would transfer to their current programming.
Yes, the materials do relate to current programming and curriculum at our agency. For example, learners need to be able to understand graphs and charts. They also need to learn to figure out word problems. Some learners do not know how much medication to take or give their children; therefore reading and understanding medication labels is one of their goals.

<b>Does the test reflect current instructional strategies?</b>
I'm not knowledgeable about current instructional strategies.
The computer base of the test created some differences.
Yes, especially since the majority of learners in this program are at a level 2/3. I would not administer to a level 1 or level 2. The learners were relieved that there was no writing or typing in the test and some refused to comment in writing on the survey. I had them dictate their answers rather than use time to coax them to do it.
Yes.
Yes, the test does reflect current instructional strategies.

## 11. General

<b>Do the overall results reflect agency assessment results?</b>
Again, we were provided with no measurement to compare PDQ results to LBS results.
Yes. Some of our learners were already in our programs and their results were exactly what we expected and/or paralleled our previous testing. Others did the test as an initial assessment, but the results were what we expected based on the intake interview.
They were a little lower but I think that is partly because of the computer base.
Yes, it was amazing as well as reassuring to me.
Yes.
Yes, the overall results do reflect agency assessment results. Our organization uses level 1 to 5, whereas the PDQ assessment uses words such as prose, document and quantitative which learners do not understand.

<b>If this tool were recommended for assessment in community based LBS programs would you use it at your agency? Please explain why or why not.</b>
Likely not. The assessment tools we use are more useful to me in my capacity as student/tutor coordinator both in terms of appropriate assessment of learners with lower level literacy skills and to provide a tool for appropriate placement in specific learning material. Much would depend on your finished product (hopefully it would contain Canadian content and there would be a measurement tool provided to link PDQ results with LBS levels).
Yes- because this test matched our findings and because learners could decide on the number of sittings that best fit their needs.
Yes, I think it gives a good baseline of current skills and the “skills to develop” piece is very useful. It would not be appropriate as an initial assessment in some cases because of the computer skills needed.
Yes, depending on the cost. It would prove useful for ongoing assessment. The learners are constantly questioning the literacy levels and lack of VISIBLE movement in the levels. They want to see more tangible results.



Yes, but not as an initial assessment on its own because with this test I can't sufficiently assess where the problem issues/learning gaps are. Results are too general would not be useful with learners who have no computer skills.

Yes, I would use some parts of the assessment at our agency. The parts that would not be appropriate for the majority of our learners would be the readings. These texts seem to be too difficult for most of the learners at our agency.

**Please include any additional comments you have on the quality of PDQ as an assessment tool.**

It is good for learners at LBS levels 3, 4 and 5. It is most comfortable for those who already have basic computer skills.

I found the test to be clear and very well laid out.

I liked it because it reinforced what the practitioners are saying and what the assessor is saying. One student said, "It is what it is and you can't argue with the logic of the computer program. My instructor knows what she is talking about."

The PDQ assessment tool uses a variety of reading material with topics such as health, family, community, work and leisure. These texts were both real-life and relevant to the learners. The graphs, flyers, coupons, and other such material were meaningful to the learner and things that they would like to work on in order to be more independent. The only (other) comment would be that the level of the reading material was at a level that was difficult for our learners. Most of the learners that took the test struggled with reading the material.

## Observations and Recommendations Arising from the PDQ Pilot

### Cost and Logistics

Although each PDQ test costs approximately \$13.00 (USD), the actual cost in administering the test is much higher. The administration cost per test averages \$66.59, not including the cost of the instrument. It is recommended that agencies receive an increase in core funding to cover these costs, if they are required to implement PDQ as an assessment option. Based on feedback from the pilot sites it is also recommended that funds for a dedicated workstation should be budgeted for each agency. The workstation should include a large desk and comfortable chair, a high speed Internet connection, a large monitor that can be easily adjusted for brightness, headphones, and an operating platform other than Windows Vista. The workstation should also be located as far as possible from noise and distractions.

In most cases, the test should not be conducted at the initial intake session, but should be conducted as soon as possible after intake. Feedback indicated that for many learners, having the test administered at initial intake may be too intimidating.

Learners should always have blank paper, a calculator, a pencil, an eraser, and a ruler available for use during the assessment.

### Practitioner Preparation

Most of the practitioners did not feel training was needed for administering the test, but it is recommended that they be given adequate time to review the User Guide and take the test themselves prior to administering it. When administering PDQ, consistent language should be used. It was recommended through practitioner feedback that the term “assessment” should be used instead of “test” to alleviate potential learner anxiety around test taking.

## **Learner Preparation**

Over half (59%) of the participating learners indicated that PDQ was not like any other test they had taken. It is important that learners are prepared for the test-taking process as much as possible. Suggested steps include:

- Showing learners a sample report so they understand what type of information completing PDQ Profile Series will generate for them, with an explanation of how the information can be utilized in their learning/training plan.
- Explaining that they will not be able to go back and review their answers after the test is completed – only the report will be available.
- Explaining what “item response theory” is so learners understand that the test is not “multiple choice.”
- Ensuring that instructions for learners clearly explain how to highlight answers properly (i.e., full sentences including punctuation).
- Emphasizing the fact that the skills being tested are transferable Essential Skills and that the context of the material the test uses is not relevant.
- Reviewing sample questions that have been broken down to show the embedded skills and how they would be transferable to a personal or work situation.
- Discussing the overall structure of the test (three different components or sections).
- Explaining that the test does not need to be completed in one sitting and that the learner can return as many times as needed to finish. It was suggested that the test be administered to lower level learners in a minimum of three sessions.
- Explaining that although the test is computer based, computer skills are not being tested.

## **Learner Demographics and LBS Level**

Overall the agency feedback indicated that the test was free of bias, and culturally and gender balanced. However, some practitioners did indicate that PDQ may not be appropriate for marginalized groups such as homeless or aboriginal clientele where the context of the documentation may be outside their realm of experience. Participating agencies were not given any parameters around what LBS level learners should be at to take PDQ. Only 19 of the 75 learners that participated in the pilot were at LBS 1 or 2, suggesting that agencies tended to select learners at LBS level 3 or higher. It was recommended by one practitioner that the test is more appropriate for LBS 3-5 level learners.

## **PDQ Feedback Report**

Fifty-three percent of the participating learners were able to understand the report generated by PDQ. An additional 23% were able to understand with support and explanation from a practitioner. Fifty-six percent of the participating learners found the report useful. Twenty percent did not find the report useful. Twenty-four percent did not respond or gave a non-definitive answer to the question. Time needs to be incorporated into the process to ensure that report generated by PDQ and the scores are reviewed/explained to each learner. The rating scale utilized needs to be explained to ensure that learners do not perceive a score below 250 as a “fail.”

## **Test Design Issues**

A major concern with PDQ is the fact that the Canadian version of the instrument uses American materials. The tutorial provided at the beginning was helpful but did not allow the user to exit once started. An adequate explanation for how to highlight the answer properly was not adequate. The physical process of highlighting the answers proved frustrating and difficult for many test takers.

## **Learner Experience**

Fifty-five percent of the participating learners found the overall experience positive. An additional 24% found it somewhat positive. Six percent indicated that it was a negative experience and 4% did not respond. In the comments, many learners discussed the length of the test. Sixty-seven percent agreed that the length of PDQ was reasonable, whereas 29% found it was not a reasonable length. Four percent did not respond regarding the length of the test.

## **Relevance and Quality**

Six out of eight agencies indicated that they would use PDQ if it were a recommended assessment tool. Half of the agencies (4) said that the materials used in PDQ related to current programming and curriculum at the agency. One agency did not feel that the materials used in PDQ related and three agencies did not respond. Four agencies felt that the overall PDQ results reflected agency assessment results. Two agencies gave non-definitive responses and two agencies did not respond. Fifty-nine percent of the participating learners agreed overall that PDQ was relevant to their goals. Thirty-three percent of the participating learners disagreed overall that PDQ was relevant to their goals and 8% did not respond.