



Summary outcomes from the SHARE Essential Skills Knowledge Forum with Dr. Robin Millar

Hosted by: [Literacy Alberta](#)

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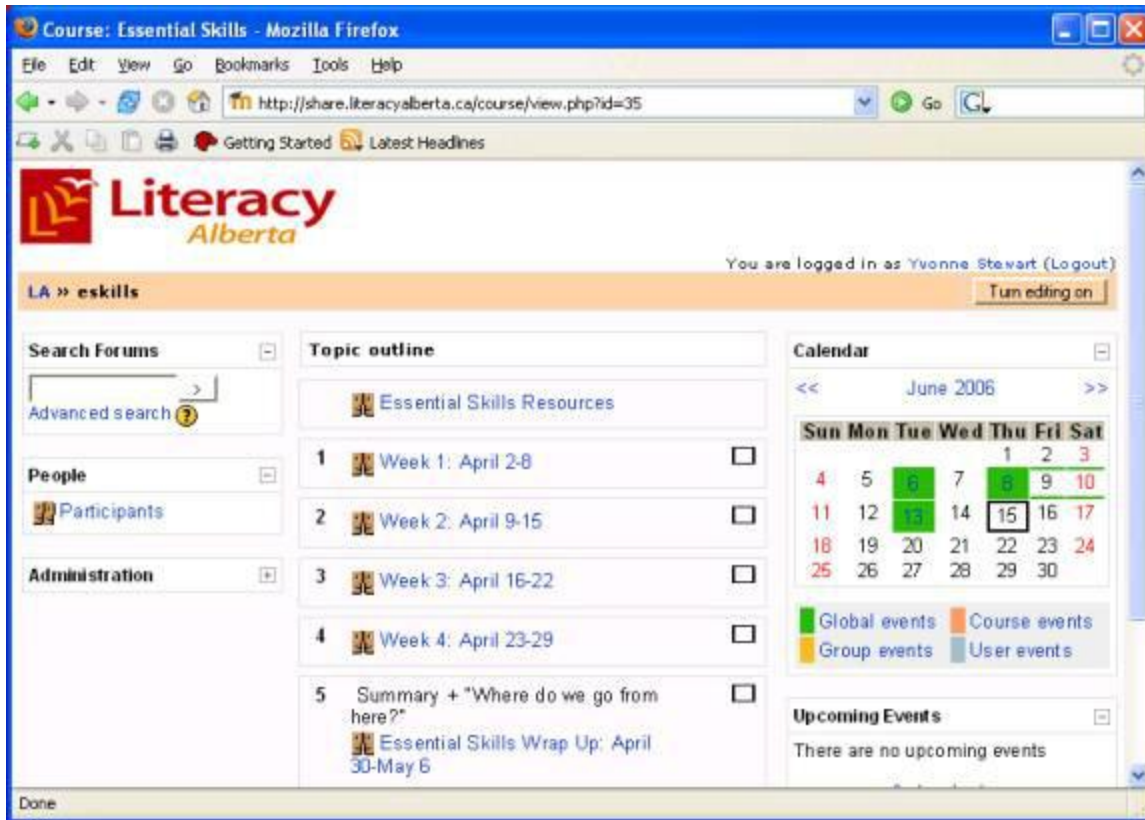
Summary

The **Essential Skills Forum** was a six-week project that ran from **March 26 - May 6, 2006** (pre-project preparation & outlines started March 20). In May, there were 41 Registered Participants (5 of whom were out-of-province). The forum had 2,153 web page hits, or people accessing and responding to information.

Participants from Alberta, Manitoba, BC and the Northwest Territories joined Dr. Millar “live” online Thursdays from 1:00 pm - 3:00 pm MST. Questions were welcome and answered outside of office hours as well.

The steps taken for creating the Essential Skills Forum were:

1. Dr. Millar was contacted.
2. A scheduled forum participation time and moderator availability was agreed on.
3. A Share orientation session on forum development/style options was completed.
4. Dr. Millar suggested topics for discussion.
5. The forum was announced on SHARE and to other literacy groups.
6. A weekly topic format was agreed upon (shown below)
 - o Essential Skills Resources
 - o Weeks 1 to 4
 - o Summary: Where do we go from here?
7. The forums in SHARE were created.
8. The recommended resources were uploaded.
9. SHARE user accounts were created for new participants.
10. Email updates were integrated with conference.
11. New user accounts were created and provided SHARE “first timers” with a conferencing guide they could use during our orientation.
12. A telephone orientation session was given to new participants.
13. Conference moderation, posting resources, telephone support, etc.
14. An Essential Skills Survey was created.
15. The survey was posted on Survey Monkey.
16. An evaluation of the Survey and Exporting of Survey Data was done.
17. A summary report was created and posted on the NALD website.
18. A final report was created.



Dissemination of research findings and information

The following research and resources were shared:

- An Essential Skills Profile: Front Desk Clerk, R. Millar
- [Facilitator Guide](#), R. Millar
- Essential Skills Q & A Session (March 30), Literacy Alberta
- Certificate in Literacy and Learning
- Essential Skills Presentation, Scott Murray
- Student Assessment Guide - Dr. P. Campbell
- Assessments recommended by D. Rosen
- How to Set Up an Essential Skills Program in your Union or Workplace - AUPE, N. Steel
- Essential Investment DVD from AUPE
- Employer Resource Package - L. Komadina, Wainwright Learn Program

Information exchange and experiences

Over the five-week period, participants initiated 52 discussions. Topics ranged from “how do we incorporate essential skills into our programs given time and money constraints to the importance of including essential skills.” “[Essential Skills] is another way to connect with resources that may have been closed to you before because they did not see themselves as fitting the traditional definitions.” B. Gowan.

Significant impact ... many participants felt that the current model of program delivery needs to be changed in order to support more development in this area. Essential Skills are used in the community if, after a community assessment, they are one of the three top priorities that a community needs. But if they are not a community priority then given time, and capacity constraints, “essential skills information is just another load on our work”. Though all participants recognized that essential skills are important, they are continuing to struggle with how essential skills and literacy “fit together”, for example: “sometimes we try to ignore Essential Skills because we're afraid that the focus is more on the skills than the learner, while literacy programs focus more on the learners. Then someone talks about Essential Skills in a way that makes sense and we think we should pay more attention to them.”

Practitioners are struggling with how much they can load on volunteer tutors (and themselves!) despite the fact that essential skills are helpful in setting up a framework for tutors and students. Essential skills is seen as one of the issues surrounding the problem of balancing greater expectations, limited funding, and the sometimes conflicting mandates of literacy, community, and educational programs. Look for needed changes to our current system of program delivery from this and other forums that echo the preceding statements.

Networking and partnerships...the additional resources shared are valuable. We granted access to the Essential Skills Forum in May-June (after the project ended) to six participants who learned about this forum from their colleagues.

Survey Results

All participants were emailed an Essential Skills Feedback Survey. The results:

- 100% survey respondents agreed this forum provided them with links to research and related topics.
- 75% would recommend the Essential Skills Forum to new/other Literacy Practitioners.
- 71% provided me with an opportunity to network and exchange ideas.
- 67% agreed that it facilitated discussion amongst literacy practitioners.
- 67% agreed that this forum provided them with a method for gathering, storing and sharing resources and information to and from others.

Written comments and recommendations:

- “great method of gaining information”
- “still need "in person discussions”
- “an excellent beginning to a discussion...I think it should be revisited”
- “put training course online”
- “was the best workshop so far”
- “Thank you for making the effort to do this. I think it was a great idea ...so encourage you to keep trying”
- “SHARE conferencing is easy to use”

Conclusion

This was a good beginning to Essential Skills. We've opened up the topic for discussion on the network, have had some insight into the barriers preventing essential skills from being adopted in some communities, and have been able to share many resources.

Though this forum has ended, it had a significant impact on participants. They are sharing the information with their colleagues, they are using some of the resources and they are discussing ways that essential skills can and should be added to their practice. Though many participants were “lurkers” or participants that have read and used the resources without asking questions or sharing their opinions; they too benefit from the contacts they have made and the network of expertise they can access. When the participants are ready to encompass Essential Skills within their programs they already have a number of resources they can use, and a team of experts willing and able to help them.

Special thanks to:

- Dr. Robin Millar who has agreed to continue to act as moderator and participant in this forum. She has graciously agreed to continue to answer questions and share resources.
- Thanks to Dr. Kathleen Flanagan Coordinator, Adult Learning Knowledge Centre (Canadian Council on Learning) for providing the funding to make this project possible.
- Charles Ramsey and the National Adult Literacy Database web team for posting our project summary on NALD.