

Claire's Accountability Top 10

by Claire Elliott

Advisory Committee on Literacy and Essential Skills.

(2005). *Towards a fully literate Canada: Achieving national goals through a comprehensive pan-Canadian literacy strategy*. Retrieved January 6, 2008, from the National Adult Literacy Database: www.nald.ca/fulltext/towards/towards.pdf

This proposed national strategy articulates a vision for adult literacy in Canada. It recommends that the Government of Canada proclaim literacy a right, and stresses the need for national goal setting. It outlines seven guiding principles (a broad view of literacy; a focus on the learner; community solutions; support for literate environments; respect for language and culture; stakeholder involvement; and results measurement and reporting), and ten strategic objectives for a federal role in literacy. Finally, it recommends that the federal government invest in direct delivery of literacy programmes; that it work with provinces/territories to establish a coherent national Adult Learning System; and that accords between the federal and provincial governments provide core and sustainable funding to attain the vision and concrete targets outlined in the report. [CE]

Aucoin, P., & M.D. Jarvis

(2005). *Modernizing government accountability: A framework for reform*. Retrieved January 23, 2008, from the Canada School of Public Service web site: www.cspsefpc.gc.ca/Research/publications/pdfs/p131_e.pdf

This paper offers a detailed but accessible examination of the principles, structures and challenges of current accountability structures in Canada's system of governance. It offers realistic and constructive ways of strengthening accountability in light of changes in public administration practice, and illustrates why this is fundamentally important not only to elected officials, but to public servants, scholars, and all Canadians. [CE]

Campbell, P. (Ed.).

(2007). *Measures of Success: Assessment and accountability in adult basic education*. Edmonton, AB: Grass Roots Press.

Thirteen known and respected practitioners and researchers explore the theory and practice of assessment and accountability. Building on the premise that literacy is complex and multifaceted, the authors define the dominant types of assessment tools and then shift to the broader questions of assessment for whom and for what purposes. In Part One, the authors describe standardized, diagnostic, competency-based and performance-based assessment tools. In Part 2, the authors provide insight into the assessment and accountability systems in Canada, the United States, Scotland, England, Wales and Australia. Part 3 provides a set of seven key principles to guide effective accountability systems, based on a conversation among the authors. [adapted from NALD]

Briefly Noted

Claire Elliott, literature reviewer for the *Connecting the Dots* project, chose these as the top 10 documents that best present the debates, challenges and recommendations pertaining to accountability and adult literacy.

Canadian Council on Social Development.

(2006). *Pan-Canadian funding practice in communities: Challenges and opportunities for the Government of Canada*. Retrieved February 21, 2008, from: www.ccsd.ca/pubs/2003_fm/june2006/pancan_funding_report_june2006.pdf

Commissioned by the Government Task Force on Community Investments, this report examines the Government of Canada's current funding practices for the voluntary sector based on extensive interviews with funders, representatives of the federal and provincial governments, and the private sector. While it describes many challenges (furthering the discussion on issues identified by CCSD's report *Funding Matters*, 2003), it also offers a comprehensive inventory of innovative approaches to funding, involving higher levels of coordination and relationship-building among government and private sector funders and the organizations and communities they support. [Web site/CE]

Clark, I.D. & H. Swain

(2005). Distinguishing the real from the surreal in management reform: Suggestions for beleaguered administrators in the government of Canada. *Canadian Public Administration*, 48(4), 453-476.

This article explores the ethical and practical dilemmas faced by public servants who must comply with the "surreal" requirements of centrally imposed new management frameworks, while honouring their duty to manage people and public monies in a sensible way. It analyzes the practical limitations of conceptual frameworks associated with performance measurement, performance audit, modern comptrollership, and human resources development under current federal management improvement initiatives. The authors offer suggestions on how to improve management in departments, while dealing with the requirements of government-wide reforms based on "utopian frameworks". [Authors/CE]

Horsman, J., & H. Woodrow (Eds.).

(2006). *Focused on Practice: A framework for adult literacy research in Canada*. Retrieved January 17, 2008, from the Literacy BC web site: www2.literacy.bc.ca/focused_on_practice/focused_on_practice.pdf

This report presents the findings of a national research project designed to discover the types and

levels of adult literacy "research in practice" being conducted in Canada's provinces and territories. Though its primary focus is on research activities, it also offers the most recent and comprehensive image of current policy and delivery frameworks across Canada. The report delivers insights into the state of the adult literacy field in Canada, and into practitioners' conceptions of, and responses to, research in practice (RiP). The report concludes with an overview of existing RiP literature in Canada. [NALD/CE]

Independent Blue Ribbon Panel on Grant and Contribution Programs.

(2006). *From red tape to clear results*. (2006). Retrieved January 6, 2008, from The Panel's web site: www.brpgde.ca/pdf/Report_on_Grant_and_Contribution_Programs.pdf

Given the mandate to recommend ways to make federal grant and contribution programs "more efficient while ensuring greater accountability," this report synthesizes the perspectives of leaders from all major sectors of Canadian society, including government, the private and nonprofit sector, the Aboriginal community, and scientific and research institutes. Based on written submissions, and consultations with more than 1,100 funding recipients and 500 federal program managers, the Panel presents three conclusions: 1) there is a need for fundamental change in how the government manages its grant and contribution programs; 2) it is not only possible to simplify administration while strengthening accountability, it is necessary to do the former to ensure the latter; and 3) change will require sustained leadership at the political and public service levels. Four key proposals summarize the intent of 32 specific recommendations: 1) respect the recipients—they are partners in a shared public purpose; 2) dramatically simplify the reporting and accountability regime to reflect circumstances and capacities of recipients; 3) encourage innovation through sensible risk management and reporting; and 4) organize information to serve recipients and program managers alike. [web site/CE]

Jackson, N.S.

(2005). Adult Literacy Policy: Mind the gap. In Nina Bascia, Aliter Cumming, Amanda Datnow, Kenneth Leithwood and David Livingstone (Eds.), *International Handbook of Educational Policy* (pp. 763-778). Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Springer.

Jackson reviews the common experiences and perspectives reported by practitioners working under national policy and reporting frameworks in the United States, Australia, England, South Africa and Canada, and examines how and why these systems are considered to "mislead, exclude, narrow, reduce, and re-orient the needs and intentions of teachers and learners" (p. 763). She considers the place of texts in mediating different concepts and measures of literacy among governments and practitioners, and argues that these texts contribute to systemic "gaps" in policy and practice. These gaps subvert the systemic efforts to ensure accountability, by encouraging practitioners to distort results, or "game the numbers," to fit the expectations of policy. [CE]

Merrifield, J.

(1998). Contested Ground: Performance accountability in adult basic education. [NSCALL Reports #1]. Retrieved January 6, 2008, from the National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy web site: www.ncsall.net/fileadmin/resources/research/report1.pdf

A seminal document on accountability in literacy, this policy paper analyzes key issues and concerns related to the use of learner performance measurement for the purposes of program accountability. Drawing on literature in education, government and management, and interviews with (U.S.) national- and state-level literacy leaders and researchers, Merrifield examines the challenges associated with: changing definitions of literacy and its purposes, mutual stakeholder accountability, weak capacity for delivery, and the inadequacy of existing measurement tools. In response to these challenges, she showcases promising state and national initiatives, and outlines principles for an action framework: (1) agree on performance; (2) build mutual accountability relationships; (3) develop capacity to perform and be accountable; and (4) create new tools to measure performance. [CE]

Phillips, S., & K. Levasseur

(2004). The snakes and ladders of accountability: Contradictions between contracting and collaboration for Canada's voluntary sector. *Canadian Public Administration*, 47(4), 451-474.

This article addresses the contradictory trends and effects produced by Canada's uneasy transition from a contracting culture and accountability regime associated with "new public management," towards more collaborative models of horizontal "governance". It examines the negative impacts on voluntary organizations of measures attached to federal contribution agreements following the HRDC scandal of 2000, and questions whether the VSI Accord Between the Government of Canada and the Voluntary Sector, and accompanying Code of Good Practice on Funding, might mitigate the effects of stringent accountability measures.

[Authors/CE] ■

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