

**Using the Canadian Language Benchmarks Assessment
for Placement and Admission to Health Care Aide programs
at NorQuest College and other postsecondary institutions in Alberta**
Public Report
Submitted by Anna De Luca
Coordinator, English Language Training
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Project Title: *Using the Canadian Language Benchmarks Assessment for Placement and Admission to Health Care Aide Programs at NorQuest College and other post-secondary institutions in Alberta*

Project Dates: August 19, 2002 to June 30th, 2003

Project Researcher: Terese Szlamp-Fryga

Project Manager: Anna De Luca

Project Goal: To establish the CLBA or CLBPT as the language proficiency standard assessment for learner exit outcomes from the NorQuest College ESL Intensive Program and admission to NorQuest College's Health Career Programs.

Project Objectives:

- To establish exit standards of proficiency for the highest levels of the ESL Intensive Program at NorQuest College using the CLBA or CLBPT as an exit measure up to a CLB level 8
- To benchmark the language tasks required by learners to be successful in the Health Care Aide program at NorQuest College
- To use the CLBA or CLBPT to assess the level of English language proficiency of ESL learners successfully enrolled in the Health Care Aide programs at NorQuest College
- To assess the viability of using the CLBA or CLBPT as an admission measure for the Health Career programs at NorQuest College
- To establish Canadian Language Benchmarks as language proficiency admission standards for entrance to Health Care Aide Programming at NorQuest

Activities:

1. Reviewed CLB projects at other institutions (e.g. SAIT, Red River College, University of Calgary)
2. Travelled to Winnipeg to consult with Lucy Epp at Red River College (*Benchmarking the Nursing Profession project*) to plan research design
3. Travelled to Calgary to consult with Laura Anderson Ho from SAIT, David Watt, University of Calgary and Deidre Lake
4. Conducted standards testing using the CLBA or CLBPT on a representative sample of 28 finishing students in the February to June 2003 cohort of the **ESL Intensive Program** at NorQuest College

5. Conducted standards testing using the CLBA or CLBPT on a representative sample from the learner population in five intakes from September 2002 to June 2003 in the Health Care Aide Program at NorQuest College
6. Conducted analysis of Health Care Aide instructional materials and texts as well as speaking and listening tasks required in the classroom, and lab. Established benchmark levels required for success.
7. Analyzed data to establish whether ESL Intensive Program graduates have sufficient language competency in the four skill areas to be successful in the Health Career Program.
8. Conducted a focus group with Health Care Aide instructors and coordinator to elicit information regarding challenges that second language students enrolled in the Health Care Aide Program face
9. Prepared final report including research process and data.

Outcomes:

- Established exist standards of proficiency for the highest level of the ESL Intensive Program at NorQuest College
- A Canadian Language Benchmark average of 6/7 has been established as a possible standard for admission to the Health Care Aide Program at NorQuest College
- Data from focus group survey regarding challenges of career training in a second language has been compiled and reported
- Final Report including evaluation of outcomes and recommendation for further action has been produced

Findings:

- An average CLB level of 7 is the preferred standard for success in Health Care Aide training.
- Since the language level of classroom instruction in the Health Care Aide Program courses is slightly higher than what the second language learners tested at, we can assume that they struggle through some of the material and probably have to do extra work to keep up with the course work. Support mechanisms have been integrated in the program and are available to students. For example, students can re-take tests up to three times and study support is available.
- Graduates from the ESL Intensive program at NorQuest College (who have received an average of 12 months of ESL) have a high enough CLB level to enter Health Care Aide Programs at NorQuest College. However, if they plan on attending higher post-secondary education, they will struggle because their language level is still relatively low (CLB 6/7) for entrance into postsecondary programs. Current research suggests that a CLB level of at least 8 is desirable.
- Currently the TABE, a reading test, is being used at NorQuest College as an admission requirement to Health Care Aide Programs; however, CLB scores are a better measurement of a students' overall language proficiency and therefore, may be better predictors of success in a training program.

- The CLBPT is a viable admission measure for entrance to the Health Care Aide Programs at NorQuest College. It measures a candidate's proficiency level in listening, speaking, reading and writing.
- Language proficiency is only one predictor of success. Other factors may include prior training or experience, motivation, effective study skills and academic support. Therefore, when considering the use of CLBPT scores as admission requirements, the scores should be used in conjunction with other factors as indicators of successful completion of training and not as definite cut off scores.
- Second language learners in the Health Care Aide Programs face a number of challenges. Some of these challenges are:
 - * cultural barriers (e.g. re-learning how to do something in a different way rather than in the way it was done in their home countries)
 - * higher than average exam anxiety - particularly computer-based exams
 - * greater time requirement to process information in a second language
 - * not as independent as first language students; need more guidance in class
 - * normal challenges that other adult learners have, e.g. family and other commitments which cut down on homework and study time

Recommendations:

1. Bridging courses or specialized language courses, especially with a strong focus on reading and in specific vocabulary development will help second language learners achieve greater success in career programs.
2. College-wide acceptance of CLBA/CLBPT scores as a means to measure language proficiency will help immigrants enter programs for which they have the necessary skills. The advantages of CLBA/CLBPT as assessment tools is that they are ESL friendly and they measure language proficiency in all four skills. The acceptance of these tools will help remove some of the current barriers that are preventing skilled immigrants from fast-tracking into training and employment for which they already have the experience and skills. Both Red River College and SAIT have been successful in establishing Canadian Language Benchmarks entrance requirements.
3. Promote greater awareness and understanding of the CLBA/CLBPT tests within NorQuest College's departments, especially the assessment department and the registrar's office.
4. Make CLBPT more accessible as a placement tool within programs. For example, in the ESL Intensive Program at NorQuest College, if students could be admitted with "fresh" CLB scores, then the students' needs could be better aligned with the curriculum.