



# DEAF LITERACY INITIATIVE AS LEAD DEAF CAMERA ASSESSOR: An Examination

## Abstract

Since 2006, DLI has lead the way in adapting a valid literacy assessment tool to meet the cultural and linguistic needs of the Deaf Stream. They have trained assessors who are Deaf and fluent in American Sign Language (ASL). They have been successful in assessing learners across the province. This paper will review relevant factors determining whether they should continue to provide this service, or for literacy programs to take on their own.

Prepared for Deaf Literacy Initiative

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## Preamble

In 2008 Deaf Literacy Initiative (DLI) received funding to adapt the original CAMERA (Communications and Math Employment Readiness Assessment) tool that was developed by Pathways to Possibilities (PTP) Adult Learning and Employment Program for the Anglophone Stream to suit the cultural and linguistic needs of the Deaf community. The tool serves to determine placement and level of learner and to monitor progress throughout the course of their studies. Following its successful adaptation, PTP selected and trained a Deaf CAMERA assessor to assess learners at all 15 literacy sites throughout the province. The initial goal was to develop a network of trained Deaf assessors across the province to assess Deaf learners at any time, regardless of where they lived. However, recruiting more assessors proved to be problematic and only four were trained: all of whom were already employed in the literacy field. According to PTP, it is best practice to have an independent assessor conduct and score the assessments<sup>1</sup>. These guidelines help to avoid potential conflicts of interest, bias, or to skew impartiality. DLI proposes it should continue to be the point organization to conduct assessments of Deaf learners using Deaf CAMERA with a trained Deaf assessor. Since the adaptation of CAMERA for the Deaf Stream, several programs have reported satisfaction with it, however, some programs use their own assessments. This report will examine the results of a review of relevant documents, views from Deaf literacy program administrators and practitioners, a recent survey, and communications with the Executive Director and Master Assessor, and the supporting reasons whether DLI should maintain the role as assessor organization.

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<sup>1</sup> PTP communication, April 2019

## History

CAMERA was initially developed by Pathways to Possibilities (PTP) Adult Learning and Employment program for the Anglophone stream in 2000. Deaf learners represent just 1% of the total number of learners in LBS programs.<sup>2</sup> While the number of Deaf learners is small in contrast to the Anglophone, Francophone, and Native streams, their community is a diverse group of Deaf, hard of hearing, Deaf-Blind and deafened individuals, and one that has also been marginalized by society. They have been subjected to oppression and discrimination, lower education and increased challenges in finding and keeping employment. A learner's test performance may be compounded especially on tests that have been designed for and by the majority language and culture. In 2005 PTP had begun looking into alternate forms and adaptations for the Francophone and Native Streams. Deaf Literacy Initiative then met with them to discuss the possibility of revising it for the Deaf Stream. By 2009, a set of guiding principles was established for the adaptations.<sup>3</sup> The guide was the culmination of extensive research, meetings, and development work between DLI and PTP, Deaf practitioners, deafblind practitioners, and community experts. The guiding principles assessed the methods on how to present questions (i.e. directly in ASL by deaf assessor, through a hearing assessor with interpreter and/or DI), and adapted CAMERA to be more culturally and linguistically relevant. Several consultations were held to adapt task content for Stage 1, increasing the test validity and reliability. Stage 1 was finalized in 2012 and by 2014, adaptations were completed for Stages 2 & 3. The Deaf CAMERA levels 1, 2 & 3 align with the Ontario Adult Literacy Curriculum Framework (OALCF), which helps to identify what level learner should be placed in, and what resources practitioners may use to support learners' progress. Deaf CAMERA was used in

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<sup>2</sup> Deaf Literacy Initiative, LBS Evaluation – Final Report, November 2016, p 201

<sup>3</sup> Adaptation to Deaf CAMERA for the Deaf Stream DLI report, 2009

conjunction with BDS (Bridging Deaf Success), which was also adapted for the Deaf stream from Signposts and includes a range of learner activities according to learner level. Of the five goal paths, the most common identified by Deaf learners were: Independence, Employment, and Transition to Academic Upgrading.<sup>4</sup>

A Deaf employee of DLI was trained to administer the test and subsequently became master assessor, who then trained four more assessors. Support across all programs, deaf literacy experts, and advisory committee was, and continues to be, unanimous in maintaining the provision of Deaf assessors delivering the assessments directly to Deaf learners in ASL. All those involved found that the assessments by a Deaf assessor to be much improved. Following its successful adaptation, the Deaf assessor conducted assessments on many Deaf learners in the province. The organization (DLI) is now pondering the next steps in the continuation of assessing LBS learners in the Deaf Stream and re-visiting the question of whether practitioners from the local literacy programs should be trained and return to assess their learners or those in other programs, or whether DLI should continue to provide this service.

#### Background on Deaf Literacy and Basic Skills Programs

- There are 15 literacy sites in Ontario [see Appendix A]
- Number of learners: The 2016 report indicates that there were 317 learners.<sup>5</sup>
- Number of practitioners: Approximately 30 practitioners, both full and part-time, were identified
- Ratio of Deaf/hearing practitioners: The majority of practitioners in the Deaf literacy programs are Deaf and fluent in ASL. Hearing staff are also fluent in

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<sup>4</sup> Deaf Literacy Initiative, Research Report: Adapting CAMERA for the Deaf Stream, April 2009, p 1-2

<sup>5</sup> Cathexis Consulting, LBS Evaluation: Final Report, 2016, p 201

signed language. Staff at the Deaf Blind literacy programs are all hearing, some partially-sighted, working with a subgroup of Deaf Blind learners who may not have ASL as their primary language, nor any strong foundational language.

- Ratio of Practitioner to Learners: On average, ratio is 1:8 with the exception of programs that feature individualized learning.

## Rationale

Deaf Literacy Initiative is the umbrella organization of the Deaf literacy programs in Ontario. They have been instrumental in working extensively for several years with PTP, service providers, and literacy experts in adapting the CAMERA and ensuring it was suitable for the Deaf Stream. They developed assessor guide books, scoring sheets, and summary sheets. They are intimate with the goals, tasks, scoring and debriefing of the assessment tool. On two occasions they attempted to recruit new assessor trainees, in effort to build up an available pool of assessors ready to assess learners at any of the 15 sites in Ontario. The recruitment process, however, failed to produce any applicants. Eventually four Deaf individuals who were already employed in Deaf LBS literacy programs, were trained to administer the test. Two of these newly-trained assessors, however, withdrew shortly afterwards following a change in jobs. DeSousa has administered the Stage 1 tests for almost a decade, and Stages 2 & 3 for the past four years, creating a reliable and unbiased source for the assessment of new and current learners and resources for practitioners. Several factors lend support towards DLI's continuance in the provision of Deaf CAMERA to learners at the 15 sites. The purpose of this paper will be to examine each of these further in depth. Views from LBS managers from all sites will be documented as well as those from practitioners.

## Methodology:

- 1- Review of relevant reports from DLI
- 2- Communications with DLI Executive Director and Master Assessor
- 3- Interviews with LBS Managers and Practitioners (email, video, and phone)
- 4- Review of DLI survey results completed by practitioners

## Discussion

There are several factors in the consideration of DLI continuing in their performance as lead assessors for the literacy programs. Among these are the following:

- cultural and linguistic relevance
- validity and reliability of test scores
- small pool of literacy programs
- limited resources at literacy programs
- cost
- number of assessments
- learner performance enhanced with reduced anxiety
- greater test administration consistency
- increased neutrality (practitioners avoid assessing their own students)
- ease of referrals/clarity of role
- practitioner training

1. *Cultural and linguistic relevance*: The Deaf community is culturally diverse, consisting of Deaf, hard of hearing, Deafened, Deaf-Blind. Learners may have been educated in various methods: some in ASL, Simultaneous Communication, Signed Exact English, Total Communication, orally, or in another signed language. Practitioners must find a

common language in which to teach them or come up with ways to accommodate them. Deaf learners in the literacy programs face challenges when they enter a class where learner's skills in Both English and ASL vary. Furthermore, many may have English as a 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> language, and some may have had very limited education in their home country which further provides a barrier to their learning abilities. Many standardized tests include English vocabulary that is unfamiliar, and sentences may include clauses that are difficult to decipher. Standardized tests are commonly viewed as tools for assessing learners and students' progress and assist them in attaining their goals. Teresa Crowe Mason stated, "Research findings suggest that many standardized assessments are culturally and linguistically biased in favor of the majority culture and language".<sup>6</sup> As a group, the Deaf Community has also been historically oppressed and frequently discriminated, and such testing may serve Deaf test participants to re-experience oppression and discrimination.<sup>7</sup> DLI has a long history of involvement in the field of Deaf Literacy. The staff are also Deaf, which lends a deeper understanding, sensitivity and insight into the cultural and linguistic needs of Deaf learners. Together with community literacy experts, they examined methods of how test questions were presented i.e., with hearing assessor and interpreter, and/or DI, and directly in ASL with a Deaf assessor. As a result of this testing, it was determined that the ideal method of test administration is through a Deaf assessor who is culturally deaf, knowledgeable in linguistics and structure of ASL, knowledgeable in literacy assessments and best practices, fluent in English, and knowledgeable in the field and of common issues faced by learners.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Mason, Teresa Crowe, " Cross-Cultural Instrument Translation: Assessment, Translation, and Statistical Applications, American Annals of the Deaf, Vol 150, No 1, Spring 2005, pp 67-72)

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p 68

<sup>8</sup> Deaf Literacy Initiative, "Research Report: Adapting CAMERA to the Deaf Stream, Phase One", April 2009, p 5

2. *Increased validity and reliability of test scores:* Standardized tests are commonly viewed as tools for assessing learners' progress to assist them in attaining their goals. There are potentially harmful implications if measurements are invalid or unreliable.<sup>9</sup> The National Deaf Center further states:

Low or failing test scores can have long-term effects and can dictate or limit life choices for deaf students. Results of tests for academic courses, vocational aptitude, professional licensing, certification, driving, college entrance, and others, can open or close the door to a deaf individual's access to professions, employment, education, and other life choices.<sup>10</sup>

Test-taking is not commonly taught in schools or literacy programs for Deaf students and it is something that perhaps should be considered. "The language style and structure of tests can present obstacles to individuals who do not have a strong language base. Tests use phrasing, grammar, and sentence structure that is different from everyday English. Multiple-choice questions, idioms, words with multiple meanings, homophones, and those with complex grammar or unnecessary information may be difficult to understand for some deaf students. Thus, test results may underestimate these students' skills and abilities, making it difficult to determine the significance of the results and how they should be used".<sup>11</sup>

Deaf CAMERA was tested and retested multiple times and at different sites. Great caution was taken to avoid changing the content of the original CAMERA, in order to maintain the validity. Tests were conducted with a hearing assessor and compared with a

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<sup>9</sup> Mason, pp 68-72

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.ctdoinstitute.org/library/2014-10-09/national-deaf-center-postsecondary-outcomes>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.ctdoinstitute.org/library/2014-10-09/national-deaf-center-postsecondary-outcomes>

Deaf assessor, demonstrating increased reliability with the latter.<sup>12</sup> Feedback and input from the committee formed of Deaf practitioners and literacy experts also helped to ensure that the adaptations met the needs and abilities of Deaf learners, increasing its validity and reliability.

3. *Small pool of programs:* Whereas there are approximately 300 LBS programs in Ontario, just over a dozen LBS programs exist for Deaf learners. It is recommended that the number of assessors remain small in order for assessors to be able to conduct a sufficient number of assessments each year to maintain their skills and consistency in administering the tasks.<sup>13</sup> DLI twice put out a call for interest to become an assessor, in 2015 and 2016. No applicants responded. Between 2017 and 2018, four apprentice assessors were chosen and trained under DLI. Two of these applicants were LBS practitioners, 1 was a former practitioner and 1 a manager: the latter two withdrew. The remaining 2 assessors have not yet had the opportunity to assess other program learners due to being unable to leave their program and lack of financial means to cover travel and accommodation.
4. *Limited resources:* In the Greater Toronto Area, there are numerous LBS organizations serving the Anglophone stream that are within close range of each other, enabling staff to assess learners from other programs, and thus able to remain impartial and unbiased in their assessments. With the small number of practitioners at each Deaf literacy program and the greater geographical distance between them, it poses a challenge for them to take time off to leave their program to assess learners at another site. Most of the programs have just 1 or 2 staff, and some just have 1 part-time practitioner. Also, the ability to remain neutral and unbiased may be compromised as practitioner from one site, may have

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<sup>12</sup> Adult Basic Education Association, "Evaluating Valid and Reliable Assessment Tools for the Deaf Stream and CAMERA Field Test with Deaf Learners' Input: Adaptation of CAMERA for Deaf Stream" DLI report, 2011.

<sup>13</sup> Confidential Report to DLI: Adaptation of CAMERA Stage 2 and 3, 2012-2013, p 15

former students present at the other site. Furthermore, their job responsibilities may not include the provision of assessments outside of their organization. There also remains the question of cost: who will pay for the assessments and reimburse their travel and meal expenses.

5. *Cost effective:* Conducting the tests directly in ASL by a Deaf Assessor saves the considerable expense of having a hearing assessor administer the tests, which requires hiring ASL-English interpreters. Interpreters typically charge \$60/hour, with a 2-hour minimum and travel time may be billed extra. For assessments that require a half day of work interpreters may charge a minimum flat rate of \$250, and \$500 for a full day, as well as invoice for travel.<sup>14</sup> Fees vary depending on whether interpreters are free-lance or employed at a translation agency.
6. *Number of assessments:* DLI currently receives some funding from the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (MTCU) to support the administering of Deaf CAMERA assessments. The amount of \$23,900 has been allocated to DLI's business plan. On-site, each assessment takes on average 2 hours to conduct. The assessor then scores the assessments, develops a summary sheet, and books a follow-up meeting either in person or via skype to debrief with the learner and his/her instructor. This amount covers the cost of assessment materials, staff wages, test administration, scoring, debriefing, travel, accommodation, and meals. The 15 LBS programs do not have a budget to include cost of assessments. DLI currently assesses on average 35 individuals annually. Between 2011-2018, 50 learners took the tests. DLI is no longer able to support this number, unless funding is secured for a 2<sup>nd</sup>, part-time assessor.

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<sup>14</sup> Interview, March 2019.

7. *Enhanced learner performance*: Learners have reported feeling more comfortable taking the test with a Deaf assessor. Reduced anxiety was observed when test was administered by an assessor who is Deaf and who understands and guides the learners throughout. Reducing the need for a 3<sup>rd</sup> party involvement lowers the risk of errors in interpreting: some interpreters and hearing assessors may miss out on grammatical depictions of ASL shown in facial expressions. Adult learners often have little or no experience in using an interpreter and they are unfamiliar with the process and some may be more stressed with their concerns over whether the interpreter translated their questions accurately. For some, a hearing person may represent someone that is fluent in the very language that they are struggling to learn.
8. *Greater test consistency*: having one organization handle the assessments will ensure greater test consistency and reliability. DLI's assessors were trained in how to deliver standardized test instructions, monitor the learners, score the tests, and debrief. LBS practitioners at the deaf literacy programs may lack formal training in administering assessments. Other assessment tools, such as CABS (Common Assessment of Basic Skills), CARA (Canadian Adult Reading Assessment), ESEE (Essential Skills for Employment and Education), and ESKARGO (Embedded Skills, Knowledge and Attitudes Reference for Ontario) are commonly used, and some staff make their own adaptations to suit learners. Practitioners will use a variety of tools to screen the learners upon entrance into their program. There is no consistency among the 15 sites as to which tool is used and how it is delivered. Deaf CAMERA offers consistency through ongoing assessments by a trained administrator from one organization.

9. *Increased neutrality:* DLI is an organization whose role is to support the LBS service providers in providing tools and resources. Support organizations do not normally conduct assessments. The original mandate of DLI following the adaptation of Deaf CAMERA, was to select and train assessors so that LBS learners could be assessed at whichever program they were applying to. With the goal of assessing learners other than one's own, it proved to be a challenge for the new assessors to take leave of their job in order to assess learners at another program; one is employed on a part-time basis which would necessitate cancelling classes. Neither of their workplaces include additional funding to support their travel and accommodation, nor is it a part of their regular job duties. DLI master assessor has thus taken charge of assessing learners. Having DLI continue in the capacity as the assessor organization, will allow for increased consistency in gathering input from literacy practitioners and learners, and to compile statistical information. DLI has been able to collect statistics on learner performance and progress. They have been able to observe and identify the number of new learners, the number of those who have moved up a level, and how many have remained with little change.
10. *Ease of referrals and clarity of roles:* It will be easier for service providers to make referrals/request assessments to a single organization responsible for Deaf CAMERA assessment. Literacy programs may contact DLI at any time to request an assessment, follow-up interviews, and/or resources to support their curricula.
11. *Practitioner training:* currently none of the practitioners have formal training in conducting assessments, scoring and debriefing. The majority are self-taught, picking up the skills on the job, and have adapted tools on their own. DLI offers trained assessors.

All service providers are in agreement that this assessor conducts the tests in a neutral and professional manner without providing any clues or hints to the test.

## LBS Program Managers' Evaluation

Of the 9 literacy providers (15 sites), 2 are college-based, 1 is under a local school board, and the remaining are community-based. Managers from all service providers were contacted. While they all reported being familiar with Deaf CAMERA, they directed the author to contact their staff to respond to the more specific technical questions. Responses were received from 8 of the 9 managers.

Two managers had specific knowledge of the tool, fully supporting it. One reported that while their program was one of the pilot sites for testing Deaf CAMERA, it has not been continued for a variety of reasons, among them which may be that the Deaf CAMERA was designed more as a workplace tool rather than an academic tool for students aiming to attend post-secondary programs. This manager, however, supported DLI as the organization to provide deaf assessors to test learners and would like to see more collaboration with DLI and determine whether the Deaf CAMERA might need to be further adapted for academic pathways. The other manager confided that their program uses both Deaf CAMERA and other assessment tools to identify learner's level. The Deaf CAMERA gave them confidence in the tool, having been adapted specifically for Deaf learners and lending credibility to its increased accuracy over assessments developed for the anglophone LBS learners. Their concern was whether it was necessary to have learners undergo two assessments as staff use other assessments as well. They did express an interest in administering the Deaf CAMERA themselves and did not feel it would present any issues. They regularly employ other tools and do the testing and scoring themselves. They would like to see the assessment offered at the start of the school year in late August/September

as a learner enters the program for the first time, not just as an ongoing assessment. They would further like to see increased communication and support from DLI. Despite these concerns, the Deaf CAMERA did benefit staff and learners by having an outside person attend the program, affirming the results of their own testing, and having learners gain practice in test-taking.

“This is a valuable resource to our agency! The Anglophone assessment is not adaptable, and we do not want to be forced to use it... We strongly recommend DLI continue as assessor organization! “  
(Interview, March 2019)

Other managers offered the following input: most of the programs are small and on limited budgets. None currently have the financial or human resources to send a staff (if trained as assessor) to attend another LBS program to assess other learners. Some were, however, willing to invest in having one of their staff become trained as an assessor, if they wished to work on their own time outside of the program: because there are so few staff at each site, managers were reluctant about allowing staff to take the time away from the program.

Of the concerns, one manager felt it was not efficient to have the assessor fly in from another city, and that they could not do the assessments on short notice when an assessment was needed or when they felt learner was ready. Further disappointment was expressed that practitioners cannot assess their own learners, commenting that this did not work well for small programs like theirs.

CNIB Deaf Blind Community Services does not use Deaf CAMERA, and instead adapted its own tools such as for their learners. They do not feel the need for an outside assessor to come.

Often materials need to be re-formatted i.e. remove pictures, translate print into braille, and create large print materials. Practitioners may use different methods of communication when teaching learners: print on palm, two-hand manual sign and adapted tactile sign.<sup>15</sup> Some learners may differ in their preference for using haptics or pro tactile approach. It should be noted that few of their learners are ASL users, some lack foundational knowledge, do not identify themselves as being culturally Deaf, have other disabilities, and are unable to access print material.<sup>16</sup> Assessments may take between 2 to 6 weeks to complete, depending on the needs of the learner. Not only do instructors need to ensure their visual and communication needs, but also take into consideration the presence of cognitive, physical, and psychological disabilities that may hinder learning. It is essential for instructors to get the whole picture of a new learner, in order to proceed with creating a learner plan and identifying goal paths. There was, however, interest to know if there was a fee for having an assessor from DLI to come, and whether Deaf CAMERA was available in hard copy or e-format. It should be noted that according to a 2009 report by DLI that “the deafblind are a subgroup within the Deaf stream, we do need to make sure that provision is made for them also”.<sup>17</sup>

Overall, 67% of the 9 managers reached (6/9) from the Deaf LBS programs were strongly in favour of the continuation of assessments being administered by DLI. Three of the service providers including the Deaf Blind Community Services, already employ and adapt other tools which they feel are effective. They would, however, welcome a closer look at Deaf CAMERA, and more information.

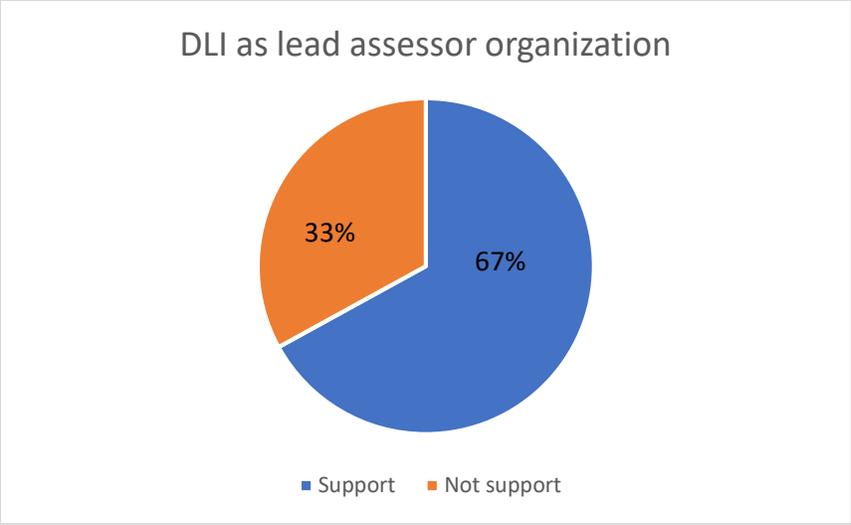
Figure 1. Service providers in support of DLI continuing Deaf CAMERA.

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<sup>15</sup> Interview, March 2019

<sup>16</sup> DLI report, “Adapting CAMERA for the Deaf Stream”, April 2009

<sup>17</sup> Deaf Literacy Initiative, “Research Report: Adapting CAMERA for the Deaf Stream, Phase 1”, April 2009



Source: Interviews, March 2019

### Practitioner Responses

Approximately 30 full and part time LBS practitioners are employed at the LBS programs for the Deaf, of which 17 (56%) were interviewed. These 17 practitioners represented all 9 service providers, providing input on their experience with Deaf CAMERA. Interviews with LBS practitioners were conducted via video, email, and phone. Other practitioners were either away on holiday, absent, or one of their colleagues had already participated negating the need to be interviewed. Or, they were newly hired and had yet to experience the assessment tool. Each interview took approximately 30 minutes. Practitioners were each asked the same questions, beginning with a background on their program, number of staff and how long they had worked there, number of learners, as well as some general demographic data on the learners (i.e. domestic or newcomer learner, language, education). This was followed by questions specific to the topic of this research: whether they had used the Deaf CAMERA assessment, what their

thoughts were on it, what recommendations they had, and finally whether they supported DLI to continue providing the Deaf CAMERA to learners at each location.

Practitioner interviews provided added insight into the Deaf CAMERA assessment along with other tools and resources used. Service providers varied in their initial assessments and experience with using Deaf CAMERA. DLI conducted some assessments between October and December and administered or re-administered more tests mid-year between January and March. Overall, the consensus was that DLI is the logical choice to lead the assessment, being an independent organization for literacy resources, policies, statistical information, research, curriculum information, as well as their knowledge of Deaf culture and ASL and their understanding of the Deaf population as a diverse group.

## Benefits

The following comments in support of DLI's assessment of learners:

Many reported the master assessor to be professional, neutral, unbiased, clear, and very focused on his role. He made learners feel comfortable and at ease with his clear signing style. He was consistent and calm throughout the testing. He responded to their questions without giving any clues to the test content.

DLI is a Deaf-run organization that understands the language, culture, history, oppression, diversity of the community and barriers learners often face. They initiated the adaptation, consulted extensively with stakeholders, and conducted tests at different sites. The assessment was standardized and administered in ASL with a Deaf person trained to become an assessor and is now considered a valid and reliable way of measuring learner's skills and knowledge. In a

nutshell: “It’s a good tool and it works.”.<sup>18</sup> The majority of practitioners benefitted from having an external person come to do the assessment: it validated their own assessment of the learner’s level and progress. There is less bias in having an outside/neutral person come in to measure the learners’ skills. Both practitioners and learners reported a high satisfaction with the ease of communication with the Deaf assessor, being able to converse directly with him instead of utilising an interpreter. Learners were able to ask and respond to questions directly with the test administrator. The assessment exposed the learners to opportunities to increase their practice with test-taking and reduce their anxiety in a safe and comfortable environment. Having the DLI assessor come to the LBS program introduced learners to the support organization and helped them learn about DLI as separate from but connected to their program. The Deaf assessor also served as a role model for learners to see that a Deaf person could become a test administrator. Having DLI as the assessor organization benefits programs as it is impractical for practitioners (those trained as assessors) to take the time off work to travel to assess learners from another program. The Deaf LBS programs have limited staff and no funding to enable them to travel and meet with learners at other sites, lending more support to DLI as assessor provider.

Deaf CAMERA has been tried, revised, and tried again to test its accuracy with Deaf learners. It is the only standardized test that has been adapted for the Deaf stream; other tools were designed for and by the Anglophone stream, reducing its reliability and validity.

DLI is a great resource to turn to when in need of resources. Since they adapted both CAMERA and Signposts to suit Deaf learners, staff are able to quickly come up with resources for practitioners to use. The organization is very knowledgeable about the workings of Deaf CAMERA, BDS and OALCF.

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<sup>18</sup> DLI Survey, Nov 2018

## Concerns

Some programs had not had the assessor visit their site to test learners. There was some concern expressed about making learners go through more testing: “Why should we assess learners twice?” and “We already have our own tools” (Interview, March 2019). Many of the practitioners relayed that they use other assessments such as CABS, ESKARGO, ESEE, Read Forward, CARA, and felt they were suited to Deaf and Deaf Blind learners. The ESEE test includes a few vocabulary targets which learners can click on and receive the ASL sign translation for that specific word.

There was also concern that the assessment was workforce-oriented and thus they did not feel it was adequate for learners on the independence pathway, or that it seemed to suit the community based programs but not the college upgrading programs. One recommendation was that the assessor take further training or meet with college assessors to learn how they assess upgrading students.

Because they had not seen or experienced the contents of the test, some practitioners were unable to offer a concrete opinion of the Deaf CAMERA. Despite the knowledge that test content must remain confidential, some practitioners remained unclear as to why they were unable to view the test items as they felt it would help them to determine whether the tool measures learner’s knowledge more accurately than other assessments they use. Furthermore, they do not feel there is any conflict or influence when it comes to assessing their own learners. Rather, assessing their own learners helps them to develop a relationship, identify their levels, determine if they are appropriate for admission into the program, and assess their communication skills. These assessments often take much longer, up to several weeks, providing a broader and more in-depth overall assessment.

Practitioners reported that they had already identified learners' level before the assessor arrived. Others recommended adding a checklist to identify learner activities, completed activities, and recommendations for teaching activities. They would also like to see more detailed information on the summary reports given to learner and practitioner during the debriefing. There was also concern that Deaf CAMERA did not help to incorporate Bridging to Deaf Success (BDS) into the curriculum.

One service provider expressed a preference to have tests administered at the beginning of September; or in the middle of the school year, in March/April (for those who had already conducted their own initial assessments).

Recommended to see further research and ongoing adaptations across more competencies.

Deaf CAMERA is not suitable for the Deaf Blind sub-group.

Table 1 Deaf LBS service providers

<i>Deaf Literacy Service Provider</i>	<i>Number of learners (current)</i>	<i>Number of practitioners</i>	<i>Part-time (PT) or Full-time (FT)</i>	<i>Number of Managers</i>	<i>Use of Deaf CAMERA</i>
Mohawk College	16	2	FT	1	Y
George Brown College	20	3	FT	1	Y
BRCB	38	3	FT	1	Y
CHS - Toronto	20	3	FT	1	Y
CHS - Thunder Bay	19	2	PT		Y
CHS - Sudbury	14	1	PT		Y
CHS - Sault Ste Marie	6	1	PT		N
ALSO - Ottawa	23	2	PT	1	Y
DSBN – Niagara	26	2	1 FT;1 PT	1	Y
WPL Deaf Literacy	7	1	FT	1	N
Durham Deaf Services	15	2	FT	1	Y
CNIB - GTA	6	1	FT	1	N
CNIB - Ottawa	6-8	1	FT		N
CNIB - Hamilton	6-7	1	FT		N
CNIB- London	8-9	2	FT		N

Source: Interviews, March 2019

### Additional Recommendations:

- There was agreement among all sites that they would like to see increased collaboration with DLI, as well as with other Deaf LBS programs.
- Developing a formal tool for assessing ASL skills levels is needed. Practitioners may or may not be qualified as ASL proficiency raters. Learners vary in their ASL skills upon entry into the program: some may be highly fluent yet possess low English reading and

writing ability. In contrast, others may have very limited ASL, but have some basic skills in English. Classrooms are a mix of learners with varying abilities in both languages, resulting in a challenge for programs to develop curricula suited to their communication and educational needs. Practitioners currently resort to using an informal (conversational) interview to evaluate the learner's ability in ASL, mainly to determine eligibility into program -whether they are able to follow instructors as the language of instruction is ASL. If learner's do not meet a minimum of ASL, they may be referred to LINC or other program, or be eligible for 1:1 learning, depending on resources available (i.e. if LBS program has the time or staffing and ASL learning materials).

- Professional development is another area that practitioners felt they needed, either at the annual DLI conference, workshops, or webinars. Such topics as resource sharing, results, student success stories, practitioner successes in teaching, supporting, and assessing learners in achieving their goals. They would like to hear what issues teacher most struggle with and how to overcome them or have discussion forums about assessments and the various tools available, and why certain parts are needed.
- All reported benefiting from the DLI conferences, but some programs have faced cutbacks or are unable to send all staff to attend. In the past, conferences were held over 4-5 days, and currently it has been reduced to 1-2 days, limiting the scope of topics. Another suggestion was to live-stream the conference for those who are unable to attend.
- Increased resource/sharing was recommended, such as through the QUILL (Quality in Lifelong Learning network), a regional literacy network that provides task-based activities for all 4 streams. Practitioners can access Deaf Stream activities according to goal path and level, and simply download and print them for distribution with learners.

DLI also shares some resources on their website. It is unclear why practitioners do not access or upload more resources: it may be due to limited time in their already busy schedule, or that they have already sought out or developed their own resources.

- Practitioners would like to see more communication and news disseminated by DLI i.e., more information on the website in addition to their vlog and newsletter, including not just student success stories, but practitioner successes as well.

## SURVEY RESULTS [See Appendix B]

Eleven practitioners completed a survey distributed in November 2018. The survey was completed in person. It was the second attempt to obtain information from practitioners: the first was conducted prior to the conference via email: no responses. A total of 8 surveys were filled out at the conference, of the 22 distributed. On the 3<sup>rd</sup> occasion, DLI emailed all managers to pass along the survey to their staff: 3 more were received. This number represents approximately 40% of the total practitioners at Deaf LBS programs in Ontario. Ten of the eleven practitioners reported having used this tool and one responded N/A.

The majority of respondents (80%) reported they found it “very good” and “excellent” to work with a Deaf CAMERA assessor who helped to identify challenges and provide additional resources. The assessor helped them to identify the learner’s levels. They further reported that learners were very comfortable. Some reported that they would like to see it more applicable to “real” work, as well as identify what is lacking.

The majority of the practitioners agreed that working with a Deaf CAMERA assessor helped them to develop better courses and lessons.

All 10 practitioners reported that having a Deaf assessor benefits learner to be more comfortable and confident when taking the test.

Seventy percent responded “no” regarding whether a hearing assessor using a sign language interpreter would help learners feel more confident in taking the test. The respondents felt that having an assessor who is culturally Deaf and fluent in ASL helps put students more at ease. In addition, many learners are not familiar with how to work with an interpreter or are uncomfortable. Using an interpreter further increases the risk of questions becoming “lost in translation”. Having an interpreter, and/or a Deaf Interpreter means having more people in the test room, which may create more stress/pressure for the learner. Only 3 practitioners did not feel that it would make a difference to learners whether the test administrator was hearing and using an interpreter. The majority was in favour of having a Deaf assessor who could communicate and conduct the test directly in ASL.

All respondents found that the Deaf assessor provided positive guidance and support to practitioners, leading them in turn to become more supportive of their own learners.

Survey participants responded 100% against having another agency take over the administration of Deaf CAMERA. The consensus appears to be that all prefer to have a Deaf assessor continue providing the assessments: they agreed he does an excellent job providing clear and consistent instructions to the learners. Some recommended training more assessors. Practitioners questioned why change something that is working well: all were satisfied with DLI’s work.

Have learners improved moving to different levels because of the Deaf CAMERA assessment? Nine of the eleven practitioners reported “excellent”; “very good” and “good”; one practitioner

felt it was “fair” and one responded N/A. Comments included: “Deaf CAMERA identifies learner’s strengths and weaknesses in supporting their progress”, and “I have seen improvement when Deaf CAMERA is used as an ongoing assessment”.

Nine of the eleven practitioners responded that Deaf CAMERA assessment helped learners to track their progress and moved up to different levels.

Does the assessor explain the importance of using BDS (Bridge to Deaf Success) and OALCF (Ontario Adult Literacy Curriculum Framework)? Nine respondents replied “excellent” (5), “very good (1); and “good” (3). One replied it was fair and one N/A. Survey respondents, however, did not reply directly to the question; instead, the majority replied on their usage and knowledge of these tools. Examples of their comments: “I do not use BDS and only use OALCF and milestones”; “I do not use BDS but do use OALCF to match learner’s levels. OALCF is not easy to use because it is not Deaf-friendly; “BDS is a good tool”; “Would like to learn more about how scoring is set up”; and “yes, I use it for learners”.

Respondents of this pool of 11 participants was unanimous in DLI continuing to lead in providing assessments. Only one respondent replied: N/A. Additional comments include: “Yes, and DLI should continue to improve the assessment”; and “yes, Deaf assessors know accommodations and what is needed for improving the classroom.” “yes, DLI originally adapted this tool and it works”.

Is Deaf CAMERA the right tool to assess Deaf and Deaf-Blind learners? Three responded “excellent”; 2 responded it was “very good”; 4 = “good” and 1 reported it was a fair tool to use, and one replied N/A. It is unclear how many of these practitioners work with Deaf-Blind learners.

Is there a better assessment tool that should replace Deaf CAMERA? 6/11 respondents stated no, and 3 replied yes, with 2 N/A. Comments included: “No, Deaf CAMERA works” and “other tools should be considered”.

The majority of these respondents were in favour of the assessor being Deaf and trained at administering the test in ASL, and of DLI continuing as the lead assessor organization.

## Conclusion:

Based on the recent survey and consultations with LBS program managers and practitioners, the consensus is for DLI to continue to provide Deaf CAMERA assessments of deaf learners. There was agreement that the Deaf CAMERA is a good tool to identify learner’s levels and monitor and measure their progress. All the Deaf literacy programs reported having a positive experience with the master assessor from DLI: the assessor was neutral, unbiased, clear, consistent, and focused. They further found him to be very knowledgeable of literacy issues and resources. He understood the learner’s needs. Learners also reported feeling more comfortable with a Deaf assessor, were able to follow his instructions clearly, ask questions without reservations, which decreased their test anxiety. Practitioners benefitted in receiving feedback during the debriefing with learner. Practitioners also felt that having an outside assessor helped to validate their own assessment results of learners.

While the support is strong, the service providers who responded “no” or “maybe”, were also interested in knowing more. The results show that of those who have not used the Deaf CAMERA held the belief that the purpose of the assessment was geared towards those who have employment as a goal-path, whereas their students identified more with the functional/independent or post-secondary goal path. The CNIB Deaf Blind Community

Services reported not using it for a variety of reasons, primarily that of the specific and unique visual-communication needs which differ from those in the Deaf Stream. They are, however, interested in learning more about it. Several practitioners reported a desire to see the Deaf CAMERA, in order to better understand the contents of the tool and be in a better position to determine which assessment works best for their learners. In conclusion, the Deaf Stream Literacy and Basic Skills providers in Ontario support the Deaf Literacy Initiative to continue as the lead assessor of learners. There is also a keen interest to see continued research and ongoing testing to revise and improve the Deaf CAMERA, as well as to ensure it is adapted for all learners including the Deaf-Blind sub group and those who are on other goal paths such as academic pathways.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Some practitioners stated a preference for learning more about the assessment, in order to have a better understanding of the tool and whether or not it would provide a more accurate and valid assessment than the tools they currently use. It is recommended all service providers receive more information to aid in understanding the principles behind the need for a trained assessor to administer and score the tests.

Recommend researching and developing a formal assessment tool for ASL skills.

There is a need for increased consistency in assessing learners across the programs. Programs vary in their approaches, teaching styles, assessments, and curricula. Some programs use Deaf CAMERA, other rely on other assessment tools.

It is recommended to DLI assessor insert more detail into summary reports to practitioners and learners.

It is recommended that further adaptations of Deaf CAMERA be made for the Deaf-Blind subgroup. Considerations need to be made to ensure testing environment, devices, and accommodation is visually and communication-friendly.

It is recommended that DLI create a learner Skype account to use during test-taking in lieu of accessing practitioner's account. This will aid in increasing privacy (learners can see practitioner's contact list) and avoid interruptions of calls.

It is suggested that practitioners receive additional training to use BDS.

Recommended to increase resource sharing on DLI website and among service providers.

Previous research shows that best practice is to have an assessor who is a culturally Deaf person trained in Deaf CAMERA, using clear and consistent messages to learners in ASL. It is recommended this continue.

It is recommended that DLI receive increased core funding in order to offset the costs of assessments (time, travel, meals, test administration, scoring, debriefing and follow up interviews). Additional funding would further allow them to increase number of assessments conducted each year, which previously stood at 50 and is now at 35, by hiring a second assessor part-time.

It is recommended that DLI continue to assess learners using the Deaf CAMERA.

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## Appendix A

List of Deaf Literacy and Basic Skills Service Providers and Sites:

Mohawk College

George Brown College

Windsor Public Library Deaf Literacy Program

Bob Rumball Canadian Centre of Excellence for the Deaf

Durham Deaf Services

Canadian Hearing Society

Toronto

Thunder Bay

Sudbury

Sault Ste Marie

Adult Learning Styles Outlook (ALSO) -Ottawa

Canadian National Institute of the Blind – Deaf Blind Community Services

Toronto/GTA

Ottawa

Hamilton

London

Adult Literacy and Basic Skills - District School Board of Niagara

Appendix B

**Deaf CAMERA Survey**

**Deaf CAMERA Process:**

As a Practitioner how many years have you experienced using Deaf CAMERA for the Learners?

1                      2                      3                      4                      5+

Comment:

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The process and working with the Deaf CAMERA Assessor have it benefitted you in providing more resources and support for the Learners?

Poor                  Fair                  Good                  Very Good                  Excellent

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

Comment:

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The process and working with the Deaf CAMERA Assessor has it benefitted you to becoming a better practitioner?

Poor                  Fair                  Good                  Very Good                  Excellent

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

Comment:

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Do you feel the Deaf CAMERA Assessor who is Deaf and trained to do this assessment is helpful in that the Learner is comfortable and confident to do the assessment?

NO

YES

Comment:

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Do you feel that if the Deaf CAMERA Assessor were someone who had to use a Sign Language Interpreter, would the Learner be confident to do the assessment?

NO

YES

Comment:

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**Deaf CAMERA Debriefing:**

Is the Deaf CAMERA Assessor able to provide you positive guidance and support that leads you as a practitioner to support your Learners?

NO

YES

Comment:

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Do you feel a different agency and not the Deaf Literacy Initiative (DLI) should do Deaf CAMERA assessments?

NO

YES

Comment:

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As a Practitioner do you feel Learners have improved moving to different levels/stage because of the Deaf CAMERA Assessment?

Poor	Fair	Good	Very Good	Excellent
1	2	3	4	5

Comment:

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During Debriefing does the Deaf CAMERA Assessor explain the importance of using the Bridge to Deaf Success and (Ontario Adult Literacy Curriculum Framework (OALCF)?

Poor	Fair	Good	Very Good	Excellent
1	2	3	4	5

Comment:

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### **Assessment Tools:**

Do you feel the DLI should continue to lead in providing Deaf CAMERA assessments to your learners?

NO YES

Comment:

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Do you feel the Deaf CAMERA assessment is the right tool to use to assess Deaf and Deaf-Blind Learners?

Poor	Fair	Good	Very Good	Excellent
1	2	3	4	5

Comment:

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Do you feel there is a better assessment tool that should replace the Deaf CAMERA assessment?

NO

YES

Comment:

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