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Lessons Learned From a High-stakes Portfolio-Based Language Assessment Initiative for LESLLA Learners

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Abstract

In educational contexts, portfolios are compilations of multiple forms of student work that showcase or document student learning over time. Teachers, students, and other stakeholders may use the information in the portfolios to make both low- and high-stakes decisions. For example, the low-stakes use of portfolios to encourage students to reflect on their learning is very different from the high-stakes use of portfolios to evaluate the effectiveness of teachers and programs. The research reviewed in this paper involves a high-stakes form of Portfolio-Based Language Assessment (PBLA) mandated by the federal government in the Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC) program. The LINC program provides free basic and intermediate-level English classes for LESLLA learners and other immigrants. We conducted a synthesis of research regarding the influence of PBLA on LESLLA learners and on their learning and teaching in LINC. The studies we included examined the following: PBLA through the lens of learning-oriented assessment; the role of PBLA in developing LESLLA learners' self-regulated learning (SRL); the differential impact of PBLA on students' emotions across the two LINC streams (Literacy and General); and the relationships between SRL, emotions, and literacy gains. Findings support the use of portfolios as a low-stakes assessment tool where the emphasis is on learning rather than on accountability-driven, anxiety-ridden assessment. We conclude with implications for optimizing the use of portfolio assessment with LESLLA learners and for future research.

Key Words: Literacy, Portfolio Assessment, English as a Second or Additional Language (ESL/EAL), Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC)

Introduction

Assessment has been defined as the process of gathering evidence through a variety of methods and techniques “to support inferences about what students know and can do” (Pellegrino, 2020, p. 82). Such inferences are needed to inform teaching and learning. Several types of assessment approaches have been developed to complement traditional tests that can be used to promote and improve students’ learning. Common forms of complementary alternative assessments include observational checklists, reflective journals, learning logs, poster presentations, and portfolios. According to Fox (2017), portfolio assessment has become one of the most popular alternative assessment approaches. Although language “portfolios take different forms and serve different purposes [e.g., to showcase best work, to capture the process of learning, to assess learning for accountability purposes], they share in common the ongoing selection and collection of work as evidence of learning and development over time” (Fox, 2017, p. 135). Teachers, students, and other stakeholders may use the information contained in the students’ portfolios to make both low- and high-stakes decisions. For example, the low-stakes use of portfolios to encourage students to reflect on their learning is very different from the high-stakes use of portfolios to evaluate the effectiveness of teachers and/or programs.

In 2019–2020, a high-stakes Portfolio-Based Language Assessment (PBLA) protocol was mandated in all federally funded Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC) programs across the country (CCLB, 2019), and it continues to be in effect today. LINC provides free basic and intermediate-level English as an additional language (EAL) classes for LESLLA learners and other immigrants. In recognition of the different learning needs of these two groups of learners (CCLB, 2016), LINC programming is divided into two streams: a Literacy stream for LESLLA learners and a General stream for non-LESLLA learners. In this synthesis of research findings on PBLA and LESLLA learners, we address the following research question: What is the impact of PBLA on LESLLA learners and on their learning and teaching in LINC? Specifically, we review and synthesize findings from research on PBLA through the lens of learning-oriented assessment; the relationship between PBLA and LESLLA learners’ self-regulated learning (SRL); the impact of PBLA on learners’ emotions in the Literacy and General streams; and the effects of PBLA on LESLLA learners’ SRL, emotions, and literacy gains. Then we provide implications for LESLLA learners, instructors, programs, other stakeholders, and researchers.

The Research Context: LINC Programming for LESLLA Learners in Canada

The purpose of LINC programming is “to facilitate social, cultural, economic and political integration into Canada” (Citizenship & Immigration Canada, 2010, p. 1). Therefore, a key goal of LINC is to provide language instruction that assists learners in developing their communication skills so they are able to accomplish real-world tasks (e.g., tasks related to banking, employment, housing, etc.) that are needed to function in and contribute to Canadian society and the economy. LINC programming is guided by the Canadian Language Benchmarks (CLBs; Centre for Canadian Language Benchmarks [CCLB], 2012) which describe “competencies and tasks that demonstrate English language knowledge of immigrants living and working in Canada” (Government of

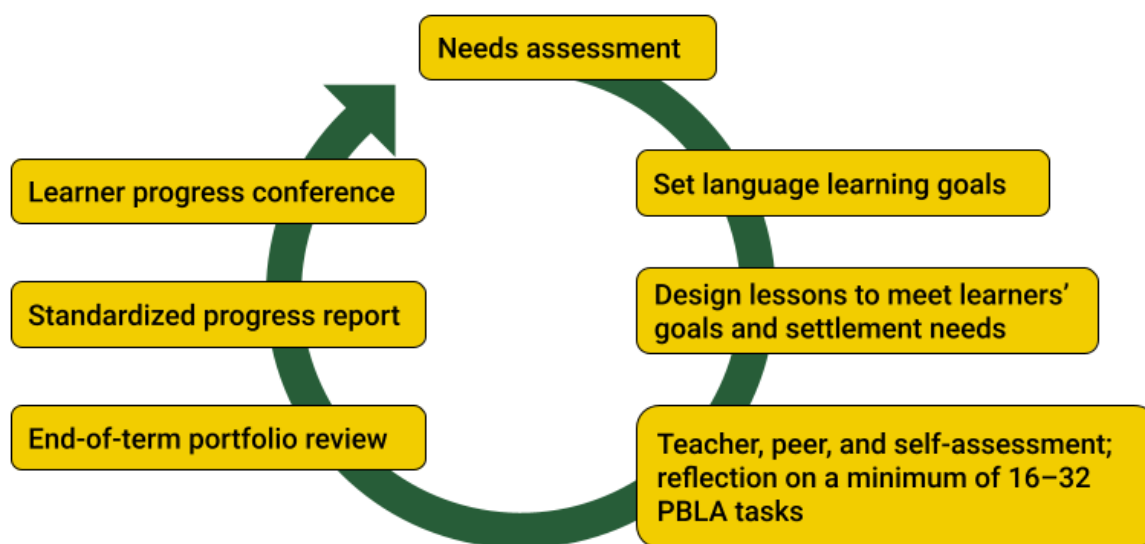
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Canada, 2024a, para. 10). The CLBs describe 12 levels of language proficiency for listening, speaking, reading, and writing, which are categorized into three stages:

- Stage I beginner - CLB 1 to 4
- Stage II intermediate - CLB 5 to 8
- Stage III advanced - CLB 9 to 12 (CCLB, 2012).

LESLLA learners are assigned an “L” designation (CCLB, 2016) and offered specialized programming from pre-benchmark (Foundations) through to CLB 4L, which is comparable to Pre-A1, A1, and A2 on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) (North & Piccardo, 2023) and novice-low to intermediate-mid in the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) Proficiency Guidelines (ACTFL, n.d.).

LINC utilizes a learner-centred, communicative approach to language teaching with task-based language assessment in the form of PBLA (CCLB, 2019). PBLA is a highly prescriptive form of portfolio assessment (see Figure 1). It begins with an assessment of students’ needs and then instructors collaborate with their students to set language learning goals and compile, reflect on, and assess a minimum of 16 language tasks for the Literacy stream and 32 for the General stream every 12–14 weeks, depending upon the length of the term. LINC instructors design lessons to meet the students’ learning goals and settlement needs. Students are presented with either a PBLA binder or an electronic version where they compile their goals, assessment tasks, feedback, and reflection on the tasks. The binder serves as their portfolio. The instructors are required to teach their students about this process by explaining and modelling the procedures and providing individualized assistance with managing the binders throughout the term. At the end of term, the instructors fill out a progress report and then meet with each student individually to explain the report using the assessment tasks in the student’s binder.



Note. Based on information contained in the PBLA Practice Guidelines (CCLB, 2019).

Figure 1. Fundamental Features of the PBLA Protocol

PBLA results are used to determine whether students advance to the next CLB level and also serve as evidence of language proficiency for citizenship (Government of Canada, 2024b). Immigrants need a minimum of CLB 4 to apply for citizenship in Canada. Therefore, PBLA results

are high-stakes as they are used to make important decisions that significantly affect immigrants' lives. Unfortunately, PBLA has “not been an unmitigated success” (Abrar ul-Hassan et al., 2021, p. 7), sparking controversy among LINC practitioners and researchers who have reported negative impacts of PBLA on learning and teaching, such as learner assessment anxiety and learner and teacher administrative overload (e.g., Abdulhamid & Fox, 2020). Given the importance of PBLA results, research examining the impact of PBLA on teaching and learning has the potential to optimize instruction and assessment practices for LESLLA learners in LINC.

A Synthesis of Research Findings on PBLA with LESLLA Learners

Research on PBLA and LESLLA learners remains rare, and to our knowledge, very few studies have examined PBLA from the perspective of LESLLA learners. In this review, we synthesize the findings from four extensive investigations of PBLA that specifically focused on LESLLA learners in Alberta, Canada. Key characteristics of each of the studies are summarized in Table 1. In the first half of this review, we define important constructs explored, relate them to the LESLLA literature, identify the gaps in the literature, and then highlight key findings from the four studies. In the second half, we synthesize the key lessons learned from all four studies and discuss how they collectively address the question: What is the impact of PBLA on LESLLA learners, and learning and teaching in LINC?

Table 1. Studies Reviewed

Study	Objective	Participants	Methodology
Abbott et al. (2021)	To examine PBLA through the lens of learning-oriented assessment (LOA)	26 LESLLA learners in CLB 1L to 4L; 4 LINC Literacy instructors	<i>Data collection:</i> Semi-structured interviews <i>Analytic procedures:</i> Thematic analysis
Abbott & Lee (2023a)	To examine the role of PBLA portfolios in developing literacy learners' self-regulated learning (SRL)	118 LESLLA learners in Foundations to CLB 4L	<i>Data collection:</i> Individual interviews <i>Analytic procedures:</i> Thematic analysis
Abbott & Lee (2023b)	To examine the differential impact of PBLA on students' emotions in the two LINC streams (Literacy and General)	109 learners in CLB 4 and 4L (Literacy stream $n = 92$ General stream $n = 17$)	<i>Data collection:</i> 18-item Likert questionnaire measuring positive and negative emotions related to PBLA <i>Analytic procedures:</i> MANOVA
Abbott & Lee (2023c)	To examine the relationships between literacy learners' SRL, emotions, and literacy gains	379 LESLLA learners in Foundations to CLB 4L	<i>Data collection:</i> pre-post testing with <i>BEST Literacy Test</i> (CAL, 2008); 30 Likert questions measuring positive and negative emotions and SRL strategy use when engaging with task-based portfolio assessment <i>Analytic procedures:</i> Confirmatory factor analyses; structural equation modeling

Note: In each of these studies, numerous bi- and multilingual interpreters were hired to translate and back translate the study documents and facilitate communication during data collection (i.e., to explain the study and study documents to the learners in their first languages prior to providing informed consent; to assist with all interviews and questionnaire completion).

Study 1: PBLA through the Lens of Learning-Oriented Assessment

Abbott et al. (2021) examined PBLA through the lens of Turner and Purpura's (2016) Learning-Oriented Assessment (LOA) framework, as it is a useful organizing principle for evaluating assessment practices in second language (L2) classes and programs, such as PBLA in LINC. The seven interrelated dimensions in Turner and Purpura's LOA framework are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2. The Seven Interrelated Dimensions of LOA (Turner & Purpura, 2016)

LOA Dimension	Description
Contextual	socio-political, cultural, situational, and environmental forces surrounding learning and assessment
Elicitation	language elicitation (e.g., spontaneous/unplanned or planned) used to infer students' L2 knowledge, skills, and abilities (e.g., achievement)
L2 Proficiency	instructors' and learners' understandings of L2 learning goals and targets, topical content, and assessment/task criteria
Learning	instructors' and learners' knowledge of learning theories and cognition, including the role of feedback and learner self-regulation which involves goal setting, planning, monitoring, and controlling one's thoughts, feelings, behaviours, motivation, and the learning environment
Instructional	instructors' knowledge of the L2, topical content knowledge needed to complete the language tasks, and pedagogy that supports learning
Interactional	interaction patterns in the learning environment involving feedback that stimulate unplanned scaffolded repair sequences and lead to learning
Affective	Learner factors that influence L2 learning (e.g., emotions, beliefs, personal characteristics, attitudes, and motivation)

Turner and Purpura's (2016) LOA framework is essentially a complex, multifaceted, dynamic, learner-centred, context-dependent assessment framework that may be used to evaluate the conditions in learning systems that impact learning and inform recommendations for improving learning. Therefore, it has several strengths for informing PBLA and learning in LINC. First, LOA encompasses the assessment theories that, according to the CCLB (2019), have been used to guide PBLA (i.e., formative assessment, assessment for learning, classroom-based learning); second, LOA conceptualizes the L2 classroom as a community of practice (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2015), "where cognitive, sociocognitive, and sociocultural factors all contribute to learning" (Turner & Purpura, 2016, p. 257); third, LOA is sensitive to both the context of learning and who is doing the learning (Leung, 2020; Leung et al., 2018), and PBLA appears to be insensitive to LESLLA learners as it has been criticized for inadequately meeting the needs of literacy learners (e.g., Abdulhamid & Fox, 2020; Goss Gilroy, 2021; Kawahara & Lent, 2023); and fourth, LOA shifts the emphasis in assessment from grades to learning, and PBLA has an

overemphasis on summative assessment (Fox, 2014).

Given that a holistic understanding of how the interrelated dimensions of LOA interact to influence LESLLA learners' and their instructors' perceptions of PBLA can inform LINC literacy instruction and improve the efficacy of PBLA, Abbott et al. (2021) conducted semi-structured interviews with four LINC literacy instructors and 26 LESLLA learners about their perceptions of PBLA (Abbott et al., 2021). The authors structurally coded the participants' responses to identify segments of the data that mapped onto each of the dimensions of Turner and Purpura's (2016) LOA framework. Then they thematically analyzed the coded segments to identify, refine, and name the themes that emerged in relation to each of the seven LOA dimensions.

Abbott et al.'s (2021) main finding was that funder accountability negatively impacts LOA in LINC. The political/contextual forces, which mandate the PBLA protocol, dictate the PBLA requirements and the minimum number of assessment tasks required (i.e., 16 in each 12–14-week LINC session for LESLLA learners), and this use of PBLA as an accountability measure negatively impacts all seven dimensions of LOA in LINC. Due to space limitations, and because the other three papers in this review focus on SRL and emotions in PBLA, we focus on Abbott et al.'s key findings related to the learning and affective dimensions of LOA, in which SRL and emotions are situated.

The Learning Dimension of LOA

The learning dimension of LOA encompasses instructors' and learners' knowledge of learning theories and cognition, including the role of feedback and learner self-regulation (Turner & Purpura, 2016) which help learners close their learning gaps. Learning gaps are the differences between students' learning goals and their current proficiency levels (e.g., Black & Wiliam, 1998; Sadler, 1989; Schildkamp et al., 2020). Abbott et al. (2021) found that although the LESLLA learners indicated that feedback in the form of the PBLA scoring guides was informative, they primarily focused on the portion of the guides that showed whether they had passed or failed the tasks. This narrow focus was likely attributable to the text-heavy scoring guides, which consisted of written comments, numbers and percentages, tables, and ambiguous pictorial representations of performance (e.g., egg, chick, chicken). Due to the LESLLA learners' status as emergent readers and as beginning EAL learners, they did not have strong first language (L1) literacy skills that they could use to scaffold their English learning, and they did not have enough English literacy to assist in comprehending the scoring guides or to use the information in them to scaffold their English learning, despite their teachers' best efforts to help them understand.

To investigate learner self-regulation in LOA in LINC, Abbott et al. (2021) asked the LESLLA learners in their study about the purpose of PBLA. Representative translated responses included “to organize our tests”, “to show the performance of the student”, or “for the teacher to evaluate me.” None of their responses, however, referred to self-regulated learning strategies such as planning for, monitoring, or evaluating their own learning, which have the potential to enhance the effectiveness of learning with portfolios. Although PBLA has been conceptualized as a learning portfolio, in reality, LESLLA learners view it as a high-stakes evaluation portfolio where the emphasis is on testing rather than learning or developing self-regulated learning strategies.

The Affective Dimension of LOA

Abbott et al.'s (2021) analysis of the instructor and learner interview data also revealed that funder accountability adversely influenced LESLLA learners' affect, and therefore, their learning and engagement in assessment tasks. From the instructors' perspective, PBL

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requirements tended to negatively influence LESLLA learners' feelings, behaviours, and physiological responses. The high-stakes nature of PBLA tasks impacted LESLLA learners' anxiety levels and even impeded their engagement in the assessment tasks. All of the instructors reported student and teacher stress as a negative effect of PBLA on both learner and teacher affect. One instructor even recounted that a particular student "would be shaking" each time a PBLA task was administered and the student's paper-based assessment tasks "would be blank every time." From the learners' perspective, they also confirmed that the PBLA tasks were stressful. A representative translated quote was PBLA "makes me nervous."

Overall, the findings from Abbott et al. (2021) indicated that PBLA could be better aligned with LOA. Further investigations of self-regulated learning (SRL) and learners' emotions in the LINC context have the potential to inform this realignment.

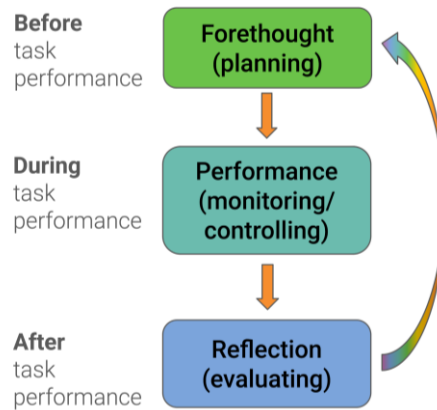
Study 2: PBLA and Self-Regulated Learning

The process of PBLA is meant to help "learners become more autonomous, self-aware, and responsible for their learning" (CCLB, 2019, Features of PBLA section, para. 2). An important contributor to learner autonomy is SRL (e.g., Teng & Zhang, 2022; Nguyen & Gu, 2013), as autonomy is a combination of a learner's desire and freedom to control the learning situation and the ability to self-regulate their learning. Therefore, Abbott and Lee (2023a) explored the role of PBLA in developing literacy learners' SRL.

SRL is an action-oriented process in which students set learning goals, and then during the process of learning, systematically monitor and control their cognition (thinking), motivation, affect, behaviour, and the learning context to meet their goals (Pintrich, 2000; Zimmerman & Schunk, 2011). Students' success in self-regulation has been attributed to having the self-regulated learning cycle taught and modeled by more capable others (Zimmerman, 2000, 2013). The more capable other, often a teacher, breaks down the learning task into the essential components so that the learners become aware of the parts and then assists the learners in planning for, monitoring, and evaluating their performance as they complete each part of the task. This other-regulation by the teacher supports the development of self-regulation in three phases that occur before, during and after task performance (see Figure 2).

The collection of task performance artifacts in a portfolio over time can not only serve as evidence of learner growth but also facilitate the setting of new learning goals. However, setting goals, monitoring task performance, and evaluating one's own performance require metacognition, which is commonly defined as thinking about thinking (Flavell, 1979), and "metacognitive monitoring of cognition during a language task will signal the need to control or adapt performance... to solve comprehension breakdowns or problems encountered when completing a task" (Abbott & Lee, 2024, pp. 87–88). As such, SRL, which is powered by metacognition, has the potential to enhance the language learning that occurs in LESLLA classrooms (Penner et al., 2022).

PBLA and LESLLA Learners

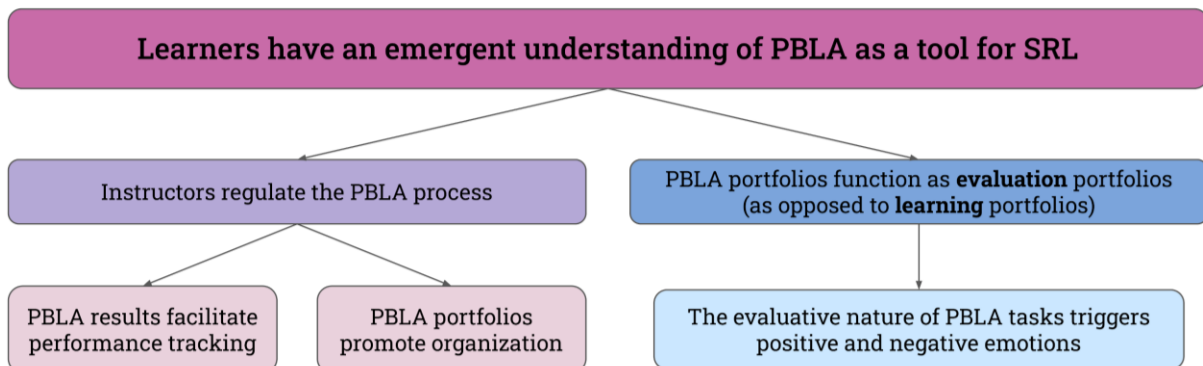
Learning Cycle

Note. Adapted from Zimmerman (2013).

Figure 2. Phases of the SRL Cycle

Portfolios have been recognized as a promising tool for LESLLA instruction that draws on metacognition (e.g., Dalderop et al., 2023), but there are only a few studies of portfolio building with LESLLA learners. For example, in Stockmann's (2006) study of Dutch LESLLA learners, the teachers reported that the use of portfolios promoted learner independence and increased responsibility. In another study conducted in the Dutch LESLLA context, Kurvers (2015) found a relationship between portfolio use and writing development; however, specific aspects of SRL were not examined in these studies.

To explore the potential of PBLA for developing LESLLA learners' SRL, Abbott and Lee (2023a) conducted semi-structured interviews with 118 LESLLA learners and thematically analyzed the transcripts for evidence of SRL in their perceptions of the purpose, the processes, their attitudes towards, and the influence of PBLA on their learning. Aspects of SRL explored were language learning goals; planning for learning; monitoring and control of thinking, motivation, emotions, behaviour, and the learning context; and reflecting on and evaluating learning. Key findings are summarized in Figure 3.



Note. Adapted from findings in Abbott and Lee (2023a).

Figure 3. Key Themes Emerging from LESLLA Learners' Perceptions of PBLA

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Findings from Abbott and Lee (2023a) indicated that LESLLA learners had an emergent understanding of their PBLA portfolios as a tool for developing two aspects of SRL (i.e., behavioural control related to task organization and metacognitive control in the form of reflecting on task performance). Because the PBLA protocol requires that instructors have their students place all their assessment tasks in one of the four sections in their binders (i.e., speaking, listening, reading, or writing), the learners viewed their PBLA portfolios as a collection of tests that promoted their organization and performance tracking. This highly teacher-regulated process, coupled with an over-emphasis on evaluation, likely interfered with LESLLA learners' abilities to use PBLA as a tool to develop all aspects of their SRL, including control over all aspects of their metacognition (i.e., planning, monitoring, and evaluating) and also control over their emotions, motivation, and other behavioural aspects of their learning in addition to organizational skills.

Abbott and Lee (2023a) also found that the LESLLA learners regarded their PBLA portfolios as evaluation portfolios as opposed to self-curated learning portfolios that are designed to capture and further their learning. The evaluative nature of PBLA triggered different positive and negative emotions in the learners throughout the task cycle. For example, before and during PBLA task completion, they had difficulty regulating their negative emotions such as worry, stress, frustration, nervousness, and anxiety due to the high-stakes nature of PBLA results. Then, after completing the tasks, the learners were proud of their tasks when they achieved the standards; however, they were worried when they did not.

Study 3: PBLA and Learners' Emotions in the LINC Literacy and General Streams *Emotions and L2 Assessment*

In the broader second language acquisition and applied linguistics literature, good L2 results have typically been associated with positive emotions such as enjoyment (Dewaele et al., 2022). Due to the lack of LESLLA learners' test literacy, their chances of success on tests are lower than for non-LESLLA learners (e.g., Carlsen, 2017; Carlsen & Rocca, 2021); therefore, they likely do not experience much enjoyment when taking and considering their test results. Although L2 researchers recognize the role of both positive and negative emotions in L2 learning and assessment (Turner & Purpura, 2016), they have mainly focused on three emotions: enjoyment, anxiety, and boredom (e.g., Dewaele et al., 2023).

In a study of the impact of PBLA on LESLLA and non-LESLLA learners' emotions Abbott and Lee (2023b) examined a wider range of both positive (e.g., interest, pride, satisfaction due to relevance, appreciation, enthusiasm) and negative (e.g., tension, stress, worry, dread, nervousness, uneasiness, and confusion) emotions. The authors developed and administered a questionnaire to measure and compare LINC General and Literacy stream learners' positive and negative emotions associated with PBLA. Key findings from a multivariate analysis of variance of the questionnaire responses to the 5-point Likert scale items¹ were that (a) the students' experiences of positive emotions did not differ across the two streams ($\eta_p^2 = 0.005$), and (b) the learners in the Literacy

¹ First, we calculated descriptive statistics for each of the emotions questionnaire items. Then we summed and averaged the individual positive and negative emotions item scores to create two scale scores: one for positive emotions and the other for negative emotions. The maximum scale score was 45. The means and standard deviations for the scale scores are as follows: Literacy Stream positive emotions $M = 34.77$ $SD = 4.78$; General Stream positive emotions $M = 33.88$ $SD = 2.96$; Literacy Stream negative emotions $M = 24.79$ $SD = 5.72$; General Stream negative emotions $M = 20.94$ $SD = 5.49$.

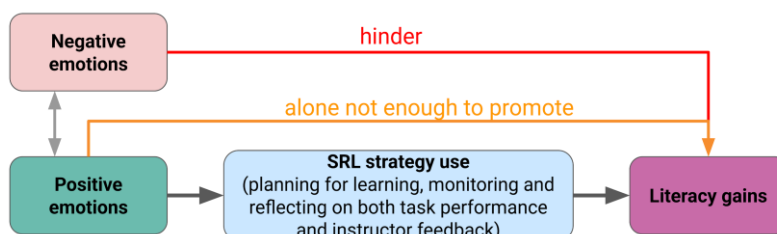
stream reported significantly higher levels of negative emotions than those in the General stream ($\eta_p^2 = 0.06$). In particular, Literacy learners reported higher levels of stress² ($d = 0.82$) and dread³ ($d = 0.44$). The authors argued that the need to cope with text-heavy assessment material for success on numerous high-stakes assessments in a single term contributes to higher levels of stress and dread for LESLLA learners. Future research comparing LESLLA learners in a LINC program that does not follow the PBLA protocol could provide alternative explanations for learners' emotions.

Study 4: PBLA and Learners' SRL Strategies, Emotions, and Literacy Gains

In a study which further examined the learning and affective dimensions of LOA in PBLA in LINC, Abbott and Lee (2023c) proposed and tested a theoretical model to examine the complex interplay between LESLLA learners' emotions toward PBLA, their SRL strategy use, and their L2 literacy achievement. In this model, positive and negative emotions were hypothesized to be related to one another; these emotions predict literacy learning gains and SRL strategy use; SRL strategy use predicts literacy gains; and SRL strategy use mediates the effects of emotions on literacy gains (see Abbott and Lee, 2023c for a review on the relationships between individual constructs). This research filled an important gap in the applied linguistics literature in that L2 emotions research had yet to examine the effects of emotions associated with L2 learning through task-based portfolios and assessment on students' SRL strategy use and L2 achievement.

Abbott and Lee (2023c) used structural equation modelling to measure and analyze the relationships between LESLLA learners' use of SRL strategies, their emotions toward learning with PBLA, and their literacy gains in reading and writing over 14 weeks of learning through PBLA (Abbott & Lee, 2023c). The key findings are summarized in Figure 4 which shows that LESLLA learners'

- positive and negative emotions were related ($\beta = 0.04$), suggesting that “the presence of positive emotions does not necessarily mean the absence of negative emotions and vice versa” [p. 10])
- negative feelings towards PBLA hindered their literacy gains ($\beta = -0.37$)
- positive emotions alone were not enough to promote literacy gains ($\beta = -0.44$)
- positive emotions towards PBLA influenced their use of SRL strategies ($\beta = 0.55$)
- SRL strategies had a positive impact on their literacy gains ($\beta = 0.37$)
- positive emotions through SRL strategies had an indirect effect on literacy gains ($\beta = 0.21$).



Note. Adapted from findings in Abbott and Lee (2023c).

Figure 4. Relationships between LESLLA Learners' Emotions, SRL Strategy Use, and Literacy Gains

² Literacy Stream $M = 2.89$ $SD = 1.39$; General Stream $M = 1.76$ $SD = 0.97$

³ Literacy Stream $M = 2.93$ $SD = 1.22$; General Stream $M = 2.41$ $SD = 1.00$

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Overall, these findings suggest that although emotions alone impact LESLLA learners' literacy gains, those who planned for their learning and monitored and reflected on their task performance and their instructors' feedback made the greatest literacy gains while learning through PBLA in LINC.

Key Lessons Learned

The key findings from the four studies reviewed above (Abbott & Lee, 2023a, 2023b, 2023c; Abbott et al., 2021) contribute to the broader body of literature on LOA, emotions, and SRL in L2 learning and PBLA. In the ensuing section, we synthesize key lessons learned from the research in relation to existing applied linguistics literature and explore implications for portfolio assessment with LESLLA learners.

In LINC, portfolios were initially recommended as a form of informal assessment to serve “primarily as an instruction tool” (Nagy & Stewart, 2009, p. 15) given their ability to showcase learner progress (Fox, 2017). Although PBLA is presented to practitioners as an assessment system that allows them to provide “individual feedback to learners, with specific strategies and resources for them to take control of their own learning” (CCLB, 2019, FAQ section), our research shows that PBLA currently functions as an evaluative tool (Abbott & Lee, 2023a) that triggers negative emotions for literacy learners (Abbott et al., 2021) which are much higher than for learners in the General LINC stream (Abbott & Lee, 2023b). The higher levels of negative emotions experienced by LESLLA learners likely interfere with their ability to demonstrate what they know and can do on the PBLA tasks. This finding extends our understanding of the barriers that cause LESLLA learners' chances of success on tests to be lower than for non-LESLLA learners (e.g., Carlsen, 2017), considering that LESLLA learners perceive their PBLA binder to be a collection of tests (Abbott & Lee, 2023a). Given that PBLA results can impact citizenship, the differential impact on the LESLLA and non-LESLLA learners implies a case of test misuse with the LESLLA learners given its harmful consequences (see Carlsen & Rocca, 2021 for a discussion of the negative consequences of tests [i.e., test misuse] for low literate adult migrants/LESLLA learners).

Furthermore, the fact that the high-stakes nature of PBLA triggers negative emotions in some learners that (a) prevent them from engaging in the assessment tasks (Abbott et al., 2021) and (b) hinder their literacy gains (Abbott & Lee, 2023c). Other researchers (e.g., Altherr Flores, 2017; Gonzalves, 2017) have raised similar concerns regarding the negative impact of high-stakes assessment on LESLLA learners' anxiety levels and called for a reduced emphasis on formal assessment with this population of learners. LESLLA learners may have difficulty regulating these negative emotions, especially if they are also coping with post-traumatic experiences (e.g., Isserlis, 2010). Our findings also suggest that if LINC literacy instructors can cultivate LESLLA learners' positive emotions in conjunction with teaching and encouraging them to use SRL strategies throughout the learning cycle, this will likely enhance their literacy skills (Abbott & Lee, 2023c). These findings align with previous LESLLA research which has highlighted that instructional strategies can enhance learners' confidence, which is a positive emotion. Example strategies include the use of the L1 (Wall & Thapa, 2023), the Mutually Adaptive Learning Paradigm (Cole & Ellson, 2015), and photovoice (Lypka, 2019).

The PBLA protocol also places a heavy emphasis on text-based materials (e.g., task directions), resources, and teacher evaluation forms that require written action-oriented feedback in English which the beginning LESLLA learners are not yet able to read and they do not have

sufficient levels of L1 literacy skills that they could use to scaffold their learning (Abbott et al., 2021). The need to read for task success likely contributes to the Literacy learners' higher levels of stress and dread than those reported by the students in the General stream who have stronger literacy skills and well-developed formal school-based learning and test-taking strategies (Abbott & Lee, 2023b). As Altherr Flores (2021) cautioned, LESLLA learners' "knowledge of test genre elements, such as how to read all the components...cannot be assumed" (p. 525), yet "language and curricula, textbooks, supplementary materials, assessments, and learning standards (objectives) are literacy-based...[and] assumes literacy on the part of learners, even at the lower level" (DeCapua et al., 2024, p. 95). The PBLA protocol similarly requires learners to possess this knowledge and the ability to read and work effectively with text-based materials; however, the teachers' capacity to help the learners develop this knowledge and ability is limited when (a) there are typically students from over 15 different L1s in each of their classes, (b) the learners have minimal L1 literacy skills to support their use of text-based English materials, (c) the majority, if not all, of the learners require individual support, and (d) class time is also needed to meet PBLA requirements in addition to learners' needs. Artificial intelligence and large language models (e.g., ChatGPT) have the potential to address these issues as tools such as ChatGPT can provide oral translations in a variety of L1s; however, teachers would also need to find additional time to support their learners' understanding and use of the digital tools.

In addition, the PBLA protocol requires learners to organize all their tasks, checklists, inventories, and feedback forms from their instructors in their portfolios. Therefore, it is not surprising that some LESLLA learners indicated that this practice helped them improve their organizational skills (Abbott & Lee, 2023a). However, due to their emergent literacy skills, some of them also experienced challenges completing the print-based inventories or checklists and using this material for critical self-reflection (Abbott et al., 2021), which is one aspect of SRL (e.g., Zimmerman & Schunk, 2011). In practice, the instructors have to overregulate the portfolio-building process (Abbott & Lee, 2023b) by essentially "doing it all" for most of their students to fulfill PBLA accountability requirements. Some excellent activities for developing LESLLA learners' SRL are described in Penner et al. (2022). The authors include activities that have the potential to assist learners in regulating specific aspects of L2 learning including their thoughts, emotions, behaviours, motivation, and the learning environment.

As suggested previously, PBLA in LINC overemphasizes accountability (Abbott et al., 2021), and other researchers such as Leung et al. (2018) have reported that portfolio assessment which emphasizes accountability over learning causes classroom interaction patterns to become contrived and stilted. In the case with PBLA, it has become a numbers game where the focus is on getting the required number of assessment tasks in the students' portfolios rather than on learning (Abbott et al., 2021). The excessive PBLA requirements limit class time for valuable instructional and review activities that could scaffold the use of SRL strategies and provide opportunities for spontaneous or unplanned elicitations where language and literacy learning is facilitated through teacher and peer assistance and feedback. As Turner and Purpura (2016) suggest, it is those interactions during spontaneous classroom assessment that help students "notice, understand, remember, analyze, internalize, and use" (p. 263) the language they are learning.

Overall, the power dynamics and funding structure in LINC have created a portfolio assessment protocol that undermines the foundational philosophy of portfolios as flexible, informal tools for personalized learning and is not meeting the needs of LESLLA learners. Literacy portfolios that include both functional goals (i.e., real-life tasks) and evidence of technical reading and writing skills as learning targets (Stockmann, 2006) can contribute to LESLLA learners'

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literacy development (Kurvers, 2015); however, the sole focus on functional targets runs the risk that learners “only learn by rote...without being able to truly read or write” (Stockmann, 2006, p. 154). The PBLA protocol, with its overemphasis on collecting a large number of functional tasks within each short LINC term, limits the time for addressing technical reading targets and puts LESLLA learners at risk of not learning how to read and write.

Although the assessment of student learning is essential for informing instruction, improving student learning and the assessment system, and reporting results to stakeholders (Leung et al., 2018), when making decisions about student learning across classrooms and programs, multiple reliable and valid measures of student performance are necessary (i.e., standardized assessments). Unfortunately, PBLA is not a standardized assessment because LINC instruction is needs-based, and therefore, the same tasks are not gathered across the levels and the same scoring criteria are not applied to the instructor-created tasks, so the measures of learning are not comparable across different classes or programs—the variation in tasks and the evaluation of the tasks that are gathered in each students’ PBLA binders makes these comparisons impossible. Given these issues, Fox (2017) indicated that portfolio assessment initiatives have not been very successful in high-stakes assessment contexts.

To address these issues, rather than adopting a “one-size-fits-all” approach to portfolio assessment for both LINC streams, we recommend a flexible approach to portfolio building and use, particularly in the Literacy stream. For LESLLA learners, the highly restrictive PBLA protocol requirements should be eliminated. Then learning portfolios for formative learning purposes, which focus on the learning process, could be gradually introduced once the LESLLA learners have developed basic reading skills in English. By eliminating the PBLA protocol requirements from the CLB Literacy classes and reframing PBLA as a learning portfolio (as opposed to a high-stakes evaluation portfolio), the instructional focus in LINC would shift from accountability to learning. This would

- free up time for literacy instructors to better address literacy learners’ complex learning needs,
- increase opportunities for collaborative dialogue and spontaneous interactions that provide immediate personalized feedback which have the potential to foster SRL and second language acquisition,
- free up time for carefully sequenced practice and multiple task trials which are needed to promote task-related language transfer,
- free up time for systematic reading and literacy instruction, and
- reduce literacy learners’ negative emotions.

These changes offer avenues for future research, as they have the potential to align portfolio assessment in LINC with the principles of LOA and better support the development of LESLLA learners’ literacy skills. Overall, the findings from this review support the conclusion that the PBLA protocol is not well-suited for LESLLA learners.

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