

HEALTH LINKS PROJECT

Health Literacy for First Nations and Metis Adults



2005-2008
Bow Valley College

Health Links

Community development approach to pilot a health literacy curriculum for First Nations and Métis Adults.

- Pilot curriculum developed by Louise Crane, The Alexander Health Centre, Calgary (Sept 2005 – July 2006)
- Pilot delivered by Bow Valley College Literacy Specialists (Oct 2006 – May 2007)
- Revision by Parke Roberts (May – September 2008)
- Funders: Alberta Community Initiatives Program; Alberta Employment and Immigration-STEP

Connecting Literacy to Community Series

Literacy Specialists work with local communities to:

- Create, strengthen adult literacy initiatives
- Reduce barriers to community services

1. CLC – Demonstration r/u
2. CLC – Training r/u
3. CLC – Continuation r/u
4. CLC – Healthy Living r/u
5. CLC – AE Courses u

(2001 – present)



Health Literacy Definition

Health literacy generally refers to the ability of individuals to access and use health information to make appropriate health decisions and maintain basic health.

Canadian Public Health Association

Health

“Health is not viewed from a disease model, but from a holistic model. First Nations people still experience cultural poverty and want access to their own gentler systems of health and learning”

(Dr. Eileen Antone, OISE, University of Toronto. Excerpt from “*Setting the Priorities in Canada*,” Workshop, 2003. CPHA. National Literacy and Health Research Program)

Developing the Curriculum - First draft

- Asked myself “What would have helped me forty years ago?”
- Used material from my own workshops
- Consulted Elders
- Made sure it was relevant to the clientele I was currently working with

Where we worked

- 11 Communities
 - Literacy Specialist Services
- 6 Curriculum pilot locations
 - Rural – 4
 - 2 reserves
 - 1 settlement
 - 1 town/village
 - Urban - 2
- 5 Literacy Specialists

What we did

- Literacy Specialist Services (onsite visits 98)
 - Workshops
 - Literacy Audits
 - Community initiatives and events
 - Leadership support
 - Information
- Partnerships to pilot curriculum (on site visits 41)

Curriculum Pilot

- Four modules
 - Based on Medicine Wheel
 - Based on 4 stages of life cycle:
 - Beginnings/infancy
 - Childhood and youth
 - Adult
 - Grandparent
 - Four hours per module (approx)
 - 3- 5 activities per module
 - Group learning
 - Arts/crafts, reading/writing, speaking/listening

Pilot how and who

- Pick and choose, adapt to suit group
 - Range included: one activity; review, more than one module
- Groups
 - Elders, parents, basic education students, domestic violence workers and clients, adults with disabilities' community workers (health workers, nurses, social workers, employment program workers)

Module content

Examples

- Finding words for Stress and Dealing with Stress
 - Identify the kinds of stress, trying out relaxation techniques
- Three Stories: Honouring our Gift of Life video
 - Writing exercise, what did you like in the video (eating healthy, exercise, disease, spirituality)
- Talking Circle: every module, opener and closure
 - Linking to prior group activity; may have guided question

What we learned

Evaluation

- Layered evaluation
 - Learners: focus groups at end of modules, activities
 - Individuals/worker's review: recorded verbal feedback, email
 - Partners: Instructors, group facilitators, program coordinators, health workers/nurses
 - Literacy Specialists: bi-weekly reports (research-in-practice approach), final community reports

What we learned

Learners

- Being able to adapt, modify curriculum
- More comfortable with creative activities: drawing, crafts, scrap book, collage, preparing food, video
- Trust: safe environment, choices, silence, care, laughter, reflection, values, open
- Not comfortable with writing and reading, over use of Talking Circle, dance (school like activities)
- Increased awareness of eating healthy, self care and care of family, communicating with doctor
- Health/Learning Wheel instead of Medicine Wheel

What we learned Partners

- Strength: Being able to adapt, modify curriculum
- More partnership building activities with health workers (training to deliver curriculum)
- Felt supported by Literacy Specialists
- Health/Learning Wheel instead of Medicine Wheel

What we learned

Literacy Specialist

- Challenges: cold calls, being an outsider, comfort and confidence with curriculum, adapting curriculum

“I found the cold calls were the most difficult,
I didn’t know how often I should call”
- Possibilities: appreciation, desire to learn, adaptability, cultural awareness, relationships

“I am meeting some incredible women who are so warm and welcoming...If nothing else comes from this project I will still feel my life has been enriched by those I have met”

Revision

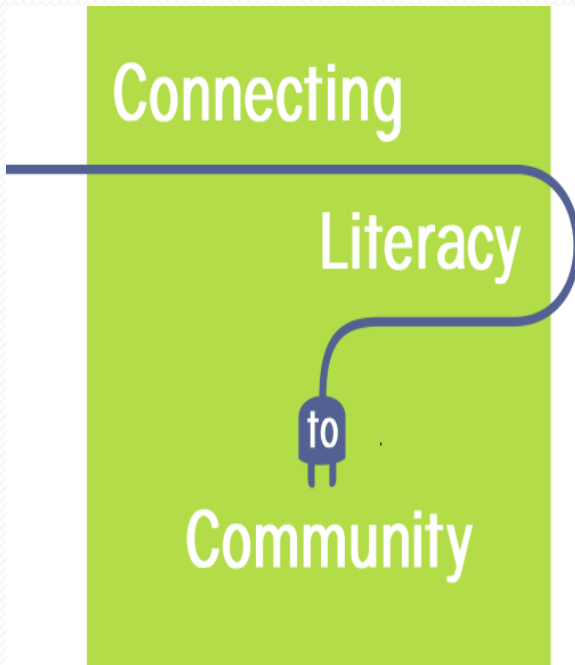


- Limitations
 - Time
 - Rewrite without re-test
- Opportunities
 - Feedback: academics, teachers, literacy specialists, community wellness workers
 - Original artwork
- Share
 - National Aboriginal Literacy, communities, NALD

Literacy & Aboriginal Education

“Knowing about our past—how we got here,
and what makes us who we are—
enables us to place ourselves in today and look
to the future with clear eyes and a knowing heart.
This is what literacy means to me.
This is what First Nations education means to me.”
(pg 27)

Cooper, Nancy. (2004) *Skunk Girl Goes to School*. Literacies. #3. pg 26-28



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