

ABORIGINAL ADULT READING LITERACY BENCHMARKS CONSULTATION

Reported to the Advisory Committee tasked with establishing
Alberta Adult Literacy Benchmarks lead by Bow Valley College

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of the consultation as presented in the request for proposals was to:

1. Present the proposed draft Reading Benchmarks to the participants.
2. Get information about what the programs in the consultation group are currently using in terms of curriculum materials, resources, "best practices", etc.
3. Get feedback from them about what would be helpful to them in implementing the Reading Benchmarks (e.g. training, curriculum, resources, best practices, etc.).

Twenty five consultations were conducted with community based Aboriginal literacy programs in both urban and rural areas, Indigenous colleges, public colleges and researchers.

Resourcing issues were discussed including curriculum, assessments, human resources, training needs and funding. There is a review of the literacy tools currently being used and their inadequacy. Implications of the lack of human resources and funding are also presented.

Best practices that recognize that they are context based and not necessarily transferable are called wise practices in Aboriginal community development research. Here are some:

- hiring Aboriginal instructors
- using local tutors, facilitators or mentors
- elder involvement
- Including essential skills, employability skills, life skills/enhancement, financial literacy, and computer literacy
- wholistic approach that looks at the entire person including needs such as child care and transportation
- incentives or living allowances while studying
- flexible intake, self-paced and extra time to complete if needed
- building confidence by including natives studies content
- learning by doing
- thorough orientations to full-time studies
- meeting people in individualized and locally appropriate ways

How the Aboriginal world view impacts an understanding of literacy is discussed. Literacy in Aboriginal communities is based on meaning making in its broadest sense and not only text-based. Meaning making is strongly context based.

Motivations for learning vary greatly and it is culturally important to respect individual's self-determination. Judgements of any sort, including assessments, are often culturally frowned upon.

Historical experiences with formal education have impacted current perspectives on learning.

The following recommendations were made concerning the implementation of the benchmarks:

- *That context be considered in the benchmarks so that people can be assessed based on what is meaningful to them.*
- *That publishers of material and creators of curriculum be informed of the reading benchmarks so that they can rate their material to the benchmarks.*
- *That the Apprenticeship board be approached regarding the reading benchmarks to determine how they integrate with requirements of apprenticeship entrance.*
- *That an assessment tool on the reading benchmarks be developed with the following considerations;*
 - *It must begin with an oral and interactive piece to engage learners at the lowest level and increase confidence*
 - *Must include a choice so that people can pick the contexts with which they feel most comfortable.*
- *That training begin with talking about the underlying philosophy of benchmarking.*
- *That training opportunities include funding for travel and accommodation.*
- *That training be followed up using technology solutions to reinforce and continue development of the tools to contexts.*
- *That when people working in Aboriginal literacy get together for training that they be given the opportunity to develop a community of practice to share wise practices, results from pilot programs, and research knowledge*

INTRODUCTION

The background of this document provides a quick overview of information related to who, what, when where and how this Aboriginal consultation was conducted. This is followed by the findings which describe some of the people and programs that were consulted in more detail. Here, recommendations are made to the advisory committee, however there is much information that might be of interest to anyone working in the literacy field (from instructors to funders). Participants shared information about the Aboriginal world view and how it impacts literacy. This is discussed in the first section entitled "World View". Resourcing issues such as curriculum/materials, assessments, human resources including training needs and funding are all provided. A specific look at programming and things that are working well in Aboriginal literacy is then shared. There was some other wisdom that just begged to be shared, and they find their way into a section entitled "Other Considerations"

Throughout this report, the people who shared their information and experience in the adult Aboriginal literacy area are acknowledged. I have chosen to recognize their contributions by referencing their voices in brackets behind their ideas. The notes from their individual consultations make up appendix 6. I sincerely hope that I have not misquoted anyone in the body of this text, as I compiled the main ideas and tried to gather the common voices.

BACKGROUND

What

The purpose of the consultation as presented in the request for proposals was to:

1. Present the proposed draft Reading Benchmarks to the participants.
2. Get information about what the programs in the consultation group are currently using in terms of curriculum materials, resources, "best practices", etc
3. Get feedback from them about what would be helpful in implementing the Reading Benchmarks (e.g. training, curriculum, resources, best practices, etc.).

Who

The goal in this consultation was to talk to:

- Aboriginal Literacy Researchers (minimum 3)
- Aboriginal & Public Colleges - private (band affiliated) and public that serve a high population of Aboriginal Learners (minimum 6)
- Aboriginal Literacy Serving Community Organizations (Minimum 15-20)

In order to determine who might be contacted in this consultation, each of the Alberta adult literacy benchmarks advisory committee members or their representatives were contacted (see appendix 1). I made notes about my contacts with individuals and these are included. In the case of the community adult literacy councils, I made a list of communities from their website where I knew there was a large Aboriginal demographic. This was confirmed by the Community Learning Network to be a good approach to involving the councils. The list then grew to 128, as

people who were contacted suggested other people. Many of these contacts (81 in all) ended up as dead ends. Sometimes this involved being referred to someone else, sometimes when I contacted this person they told me that their group did not work with Aboriginal people in a meaningful way, and sometimes multiple e-mails and telephone calls were not returned. In order not to lose these contacts, the full list makes up appendix 2.

Most of the time when I contacted people I used the name of the person who had referred me to them. I did this recognizing the importance of relationship connections in the Aboriginal community. Being contacted with the name of someone known would legitimize the consultation in a way that cold calls would not. A total of 25 consultations took place. The list makes up appendix 3. They break down as follows:

Researchers	3
Colleges	7
Colleges/Communities	3
Communities	13

Those designated as Colleges/Communities are programs that are run by a college however they are done at the invitation of a community and are clearly community based in their design and activity. Of the seven that were colleges, three were with public provincial colleges (comprehensive community institutions) and four with Indigenous colleges.

Looking at “who” is involved in this consultation also involves me identifying who I am and the unique voice I bring to this work. I am not an Aboriginal person, however I was raised in rural Northern Alberta near Aboriginal people and communities. I currently live my life integrated into the Aboriginal community through relatives (I was married to an Aboriginal man and have Aboriginal children) and my social interactions. I have worked at Northern Lakes College in institutional research for over ten years. During that time I have conducted numerous focus groups and interviews to draw out meaningful information related to adult education. I am conscious of the cultural lens that tends to view Aboriginal people as deficient related to some inexplicable norm. I also recognize the complex and varied contexts of Aboriginal communities. I have tried my best to have my conversations with those consulted and this written work reflect these understandings.

Where

Most consultations took place over the telephone. Four took place in person. Another two were scheduled to be in person, however a winter storm prevented the in-person contact. An attempt to schedule another set of in-person visits didn't work out because of different dates when people were available.

When

The consultations took place between February and April, 2011.

How

Each consultation involved sharing information about the benchmarks. This was done through a Powerpoint presentation (appendix 4) and the draft benchmarks (appendix 5). In most cases, I sent these to participants ahead of time via e-mail. I went through the presentation verbally to allow for discussion and questions. In the design of the presentation, a time for participants to tell me about their programs is included. I focused on learning about their curriculum/resources including assessment tools, best practices and training needs related to the benchmarks.

FINDINGS

World View

This consultation talked to people from rural, urban and reserve/settlement communities. It looked at full-time programs and part-time programs including a few family literacy and corrections programs. The approaches people have taken to gain success in this variety of programs are strongly context based.

I believe this Aboriginal consultation is meant to address differences in the approach to literacy in Aboriginal communities based on a different world view or cultural differences. This section will address some of those unique aspects of Aboriginal literacy as presented by those with whom I consulted.

One researcher spoke about the importance of viewing literacy broadly. It is about making meaning in the broadest sense and includes more than text based literacy. Her definition is “literacy is a meaningful configuration of symbols, signs and representations of who we are based on our language, culture, values and behaviours and how we transmit this to others” (Laderoute, 2005). This is somewhat recognized in programming that involves elders, story telling, acting out concepts and visual representations of meaning. Meaning is made through numerous visual clues such as the colour of price signs in grocery stores that indicate sales. Some people practicing in the field seem to be taking this more wholistic approach of literacy as meaning making in its broadest sense (Snip, Sacher).

There is a common recognition that students with literacy issues lack self-confidence, particularly in new situations. Sometimes this skill is taught directly (Tyler-Moon) and sometimes accommodated by providing a private space to ask the instructor questions (Dore). Confidence is also built by including information about Aboriginal history and contemporary reality through and integration of native studies into the programming (Houle-Steinhauer, Larson, Lindberg). Having more advanced students helping those who are not as far along is a confidence builder (Petrie). Being consciously aware of a community development approach in empowering students was also mentioned by some literacy workers (McPhee, Tyler-Moon). Part of this is using material that has currency in participant’s lives. One program tries to draw on local stories though the local mentors and reserve life in general (Sacher). Another focuses on common experiences with addiction and learning disabilities (McPhee).

Related to this is the importance of context (Goddard, Laderoute) and relevance (Petrie). An example is how the teaching of geometry using teepees also includes revisiting the stories related to teepees and their cultural significance. This involves teaching a concept within a story of its significance (Petrie). Beyond the text and the task levels there also needs to be a recognition of context (Laderoute).

An example given was the some people see a trip in a vehicle as a task about getting from here to there. They wouldn't have much to say about the journey other than maybe if there were stops along the way and with whom they journeyed. Other people could describe in detail the differences in flora and fauna, the water levels of ponds along the way and interesting geological features. The difference is whatever is meaningful to the individual. Benchmarks need to consider what is meaningful to people and use those contexts. Sometimes Aboriginal people have been asked to demonstrate competency in something that they do not find meaningful and hence they have not succeeded (Laderoute)

Recommendation: That context be considered in the benchmarks so that people can be assessed based on what is meaningful to them.

Most Aboriginal languages in Alberta are not written and certainly not text-based. Respected elders are sometimes not literate in the narrow definition of text-based literacy, however they are respected in their communities as being wise people who create and share meaning. This can make it quite socially acceptable and comfortable to be a non-text based literate person in an Aboriginal community (Schram). Some reserve communities are relatively insular and it is only in interaction with a broader world that literacy becomes important (Goddard). Demonstrating the value of text-based literacy is a long term effort on the part of people in the community who have come to recognize its importance. Sometimes it's showing the practical applications like getting a driver's license (Goddard), and sometimes it's about wanting more opportunities for children (Flett, Lacombe).

It is important to really listen to what individuals and communities need and want out of literacy learning (Goddard). Some work in camps and work for oil companies but have found that they have limited promotional opportunities unless they had their GED, so that is their goal. Others are seniors whose families have moved away and they want to stay in touch using the computer. Sometimes these seniors just want to know how to send and receive e-mail and pictures. It's important to listen to what someone really needs or wants and be respectful and not judge them (Lacombe). Some communities are working to reduce the social dependency rate by taking responsibility for their future (Johns-Gladue).

Judgement that there is a something missing or a lack of some sort in Aboriginal communities because of lower literacy levels is not productive. As one participant said, we've spent enough time looking at barriers, that's not helpful, we need to take responsibility for moving forward (Johns-Gladue). One program doesn't do assessments, they just start everyone at the beginning and make sure that material for the start includes some unique cultural content that would be of interest and possibly even new to everyone (Johns-Gladue, Larsen).

Many Aboriginal people have had negative initial educational experiences (Dore, Schram, Tyler-Moon). Someone wondered out loud about the philosophy one develops about learning when they have been unsuccessful in school (Hapchyn). Without going into detail about residential school effects, suffice to say that this has impacted the value attributed to book learning in some communities.

In response, program content that instils cultural pride is essential in literacy work (Larson, Weaselfat). Building on strengths and being culturally sensitive is imperative (Cairns).

There also needs to be recognition that English is a second language for many Aboriginal learners. Their fluency of expression in this second language is often limited (Goddard, O'Rourke, Woyiwada).

Two individuals expressed concern that benchmarking imposed from an outside agency might not be well received in a community (Cairns, Goddard). One suggested that benchmarking is a foreign concept and the rationale behind it would need to be explained before others might find it acceptable (Cairns).

Someone described the mainstream education system as being based on forging forward before complete mastery and learning from one's mistakes before trying again. An example of this might be related to how many people fail their learners and driver's license exams every year. She has observed that in Aboriginal communities there is a stronger desire to be exposed to some new learning and then withdraw to practice it until mastery is achieved. This takes time. When someone is ready, they can and will return to demonstrate mastery (Snip).

Another interesting observation made was that students at higher levels who are expected in provincial curriculum to dissect or present arguments often find that difficult because there is no cultural value in argumentativeness (Snip).

Resources

Resource and Curriculum Material

Participants provided an extensive list of the resource and curriculum material that they use:

- Alberta school curriculum (Crone, Dore, Sacher) which includes novel studies: Z is for Zachariah is a science fiction and Lady at Batoche deals with the battle of Batoche from different perspectives (Crone)
- Vocabulary Boosters by Susan Rogers, Spelling Tool Box, Oxford Picture Dictionary, Amazing Alberta (2005 Marian Hoffmann), English Express (though it's gone now and had more of an ESL focus). (Tyler-Moon)
- Store Coupons (Tyler-Moon)
- Arrow Might <http://arrowmight.ca/> (Larson, Johns-Gladue)
- Further Education Society of Alberta – have developed their own material that is available on a cost recovery basis <http://www.nald.ca/fesa/buyonline.htm> (Cairns)
- SRA kits http://www.mcgraw-hill.co.uk/sra/reading_for_understanding.htm (Hornick)

- Skill Plan resources out of BC for the construction industry <http://www.skillplan.ca/> (Petrie)
- Rhymes that Bind program (Family Literacy resource)
- “Read On” program of the Lethbridge public library available at <http://www.lethlib.ca/adult/literacy> (Weaselfat)
- Grassroots press (Lacombe, Woyiwada)
- Resources for NWT <http://www.nwt.literacy.ca/resources.htm> (O’Rourke)
- variety of reading material including researching on the computer, and reading comic books. (Lindberg)
- Using material with Aboriginal content – novels, magazines, newspapers, etc. (Dore)

They also made many comments about the material. Some found it difficult to find appropriate material with Aboriginal content versus immigrant content (Eek, Radley). Certainly material that reflects Aboriginal ways of knowing would be useful (Eek) however there is always the danger of overstating the Aboriginalness (Schram). Material that reflects rural realities (hunting, fishing, the land) would be appreciated, particularly at the lower level (Schram, Laderoute). Sometimes material that could be shared with children would also be appreciated (Eek). Finding good contemporary material is a challenge (Dore, Radley). It would be helpful if resources were rated so that financially limited literacy programs could get the best bang for their buck (Radley). This included not only quality but level as well and leads to the following recommendation.

Recommendation: That publishers of material and creators of curriculum be informed of the reading benchmarks so that they can rate their material to the benchmarks.

This second recommendation comes from an individual literacy program that dealt specifically with literacy training for apprentices (Houle-Steinhauer)

Recommendation: That the Apprenticeship board be approached regarding the reading benchmarks to determine how they integrate with requirements of apprenticeship entrance.

Assessments

A variety of assessment tools were being used in different programs:

- Canadian Adult Reading Assessment and it was piloted on the first cohort by Marilyn Luft who was a project manager with Alberta workforce essentials (Houle-Steinhauer)
- TOEWS and the Service Canada Essential Skills for assessment. (Lindberg)
- She talked about using CAT (Cognitive Abilities Test) now that TABE (Test of Adult Basic Education) is less readily available (O’Rourke)
- CAAT (Canadian Adult Achievement Test) as an assessment. (Petrie, Woyiwada)
- Canadian Language Benchmarks (CLB) assessment from SALAS, the Southern Alberta Language Assessment Service who is certified to do these assessments. An invaluable resource for both tutors and students is the CLB “Can Do Checklists” (Radley)

There was a desire by several people to have an assessment tool related to the reading benchmarks. There was some concern about using simple multiple choice tests (Laderoute). There also needs to be a recognition of the need for choice in doing an assessment (Goddard,

Laderoute). Someone described an assessment tool that involved reading word lists and picking one with which the participant felt most comfortable and doing an assessment based on the stated level of comfort with the word list (Houle-Steinhauer). One person described an assessment approach that she uses starting with a verbal assessment that focuses on building confidence in simple things like alphabet recognition with upper and lower cases, reading individual words and then lines etc. (Woyiwada).

Related to the assessment question is the interpretation and marking of assessments and how that can be coloured by the assessor (Laderoute). One researcher talked about a study in a community where several people in a remote Aboriginal community who had ostensibly completed high school were functioning at a grade four level (Goddard). It begs the question of what happens when people don't meet standards.

The benchmarks were seen as particularly useful in assessing individuals and for people moving between programs (Poole). It was also seen more as a tool for the instructors than for the learners (Cairns).

Recommendation: That an assessment tool on the reading benchmarks be developed with the following considerations;

- *It must begin with an oral and interactive piece to engage learners at the lowest level and increase confidence*
- *Must include a choice so that people can pick the contexts with which they feel most comfortable.*

Human Resources

The pool of educated people in Aboriginal communities who have the ability to address literacy issues is still small. Those who do this work are dedicated and share their skills and abilities (Flett). Isolation and burn out are not uncommon (Lacombe).

One of the challenges facing northern communities is that those working in the field of Aboriginal education (and likely other managers) have a lot on their plates. On small reserves and settlements, a small number of individuals are responsible for the provision of programs and services in K-12 and post-secondary education, for example head start programs, engaging with the local schools, sometimes boarding out students for high school, bussing of students, and other responsibilities in education, employment and training. They are working with various levels of government, colleges, school boards, parents and many others. Many are responsible for extensive accountability reporting. Though the topic of literacy is important in northern Alberta there is very little room on people's desks for added responsibilities. This is a capacity issue (Edge).

This is particularly an issue in applying for short term funding opportunities (Poole). Many funding opportunities are looking for collaboration and these relationships take a great deal of time and effort to establish (Eek). In rural communities often all supportive agencies are able to supply is a letter of support as they, too, are limited in their funding (Eek).

Often it is social development workers, as much as educators, who see the need for literacy work with adults in the community due to the high rates of social dependency (Johns-Gladue).

Training Needs

It was clear from some responses to benchmarking that not only does there need to be training on benchmarking, but also on the philosophy of benchmarking (Cairns). Those working in Aboriginal literacy are like other learners, they can only absorb so much at one time and often need to learn with follow-up opportunities over time (Cairns).

Given the human resource limitations, respondents were very creative in how they would like to learn more about using benchmarks. Some suggested regional training (Eek, Tyler-Moon). Other suggested the use of technology such as Skype (Schram) or video-conferencing (Eek). The cost of coming to training is more than some agencies can afford because of the combination of travel distance and accommodation. Sometimes people are willing to take their personal time to travel, or even sometimes to attend sessions, but sometimes the time away from their communities places a burden on others who have to accommodate their absence (Schram, Eek). Some spoke about how effective it is to have people into their region to work face to face with large groups of interested individuals including volunteers (Flett, Lacombe). Others talked about training staff who then pass their information on to volunteers through regular volunteer professional development sessions (Radley).

Recommendation: That training begin with talking about the underlying philosophy of benchmarking.

Recommendation: That training opportunities include funding for travel and accommodation.

Recommendation: That training be followed up using technology solutions to reinforce and continue development of the tools to contexts.

One of the most interesting responses I had was when someone I spoke with called me back asking about the results of my consultations. She wanted to know what I had learned and was looking to learn from wise practices elsewhere (Petrie). It made me realize how many people were asking me about what resources I might know about. Someone talked about hearing about a pilot project, but not knowing how it turned out, and being curious about what was learned. There was clearly interest in learning from one another and possibly developing a community of practice consistent with some of the values of supporting innovation, and excellence in teaching, and learning, and sharing responsibility expressed in the Living Literacy document

Recommendation: That when people working in Aboriginal literacy get together for training that they be given the opportunity to develop a community of practice to share wise practices, results from pilot programs, and research knowledge.

Funding

It would be unfair to present this information without any remarks about the issue of funding. Several participants spoke about the human resources that are occupied with chasing funding dollars for literacy programming of any sort. Year-to-year funding with reporting requirements drains limited human resources (Eek, Houle-Steinhauer, Larson, O'Rourke, Weaselfat). Given the discussion about the limited human resources in Aboriginal literacy it would behove the funders to consider this in their program development. In one case a pilot project was funded but secure funding for ongoing literacy work is more difficult to attain (Lindberg). Sometimes lessons learned from pilot projects can improve programming but funded time is needed to develop good or improved programming. Literacy programming is expensive compared to other training programs because of the need for lower student instructor ratios (O'Rourke) however this need isn't always recognized by funders. One person even suggested that one-on-one human interactions are the best form of learning literacy (Hapchyn). Also, the need for funding to create material that would be appropriate is also difficult to attain (Lindberg).

Someone aptly described a difference in philosophy regarding the funding of full-time literacy students in Alberta and Saskatchewan. Alberta Employment and Immigration funding focuses on getting people ready for the workforce as quickly as possible. People entering literacy programs funded through this program must state career goals. This is often not the reason that people are looking to improve their literacy. It may be something as simple as wanting to read to their grandchildren and help youth with their homework. This reason for pursuing literacy is valued in the Saskatchewan model that seems to be founded on a philosophical belief that everyone deserves an education. It's a difference between education and training (Crone). This is also articulated in the Alberta government's Living Literacy report¹ which expresses a vision that "Albertans have the literacy competencies to participate fully and successfully in living, learning and work" (page 6). Though work is part of the vision, there is recognition that literacy is also needed for other aspects of living. My observation is that Aboriginal communities seem to value the former rather than the latter.

Programming (Wise Practices)

The notion of best practices has been critiqued in terms of Aboriginal community research because of its implication that what works in one context should work in other contexts. Instead the notion of "wise practices" suggests a more cultural appropriate and contextualized understanding. For a good explanation of this concept I suggest "Best Practices in Aboriginal Community Development: A Literature Review and Wise Practices Approach" by Cynthia Wesley-Esquimaux and Brian Calliou available at <http://www.banffcentre.ca/departments/leadership/aboriginal/research/>.

With this in mind I'd like to discuss some of the wise practices within their contexts by looking at the various forms of literacy programming.

Some full-time programs are designed with a goal in mind. For example one full-time literacy program focused on helping participants achieve the academic ability to complete the

¹ Living Literacy: A Literacy Framework for Alberta's Next Generation Economy <http://aet.alberta.ca/post-secondary/policy/livingliteracy.aspx>

apprenticeship entrance exam (Houle-Steinhauer). Practical goals such as getting driver's license and filling out forms was also mentioned (Goddard). Others are forced to have students state career goals because of the funder (Crone). Others recognize that career exploration is part of the program (Lindberg, Woyiwada). For part-time programs it's important to see the personal benefits and this is done through word-of-mouth advertising and referrals (Larson, Johns-Gladue). One part-time program mentioned that the best follow through from participants was when their participation was mandated by child services (Schram).

The need for a wholistic approach that looks at the entire person was echoed by several participants from a variety of programs (Johns-Gladue, Larsen, Weaselfat). This translated into addressing social needs like daycare and transportation before people were able to attend to their literacy learning (Weaselfat). It also lead to some flexible attendance programs such as four days a week being considered full-time attendance (Woyiwada). Even for part-time programs, the need for concentrated time for literacy learning could include childcare if that was required by some participants (Johns-Gladue).

One of the wise practices mentioned by several people is the hiring of Aboriginal instructors, or, when they are unavailable, local Aboriginal mentors and tutors (O'Rourke, Weaselfat). Having local people involved, even as facilitators/mentors, was important to support programs (Cairns, Eek, Flett, Larson, O'Rourke, Sacher). One described how she made sure that there were Aboriginal instructors and guests at the beginning of the program, however she shifted more to a broader group over time to expose students to a variety of people. She noted that often when people are beginning to receive feedback on their writing ability, having someone from the same cultural group deliver that feedback makes it easier to receive (Lindberg). Whomever provides instruction and feedback needs to do so with encouragement and build upon success to improve self-esteem (Lindberg).

A related program practice was the regular involvement of elders in programs. This was particularly for urban-based programs though community-based program also invited elders into their classroom. Full-time programs were more likely to invite elders however one community based family literacy program also included elder stories with the children and parents as well (Dore, Lacombe, Lindberg, McPhee, O'Rourke, Weaselfat).

In a region that has been deeply affected culturally by a long history of colonial contact with Europeans, the participants spoke about the loss of culture. In this case, they found students inspired by their own leaders who express cultural pride and are role models (Eek). However in a region that has had more limited external cultural contact, they found that Aboriginal guests who tell their woeful stories of recovery are not demonstrating the cultural value of humility and are often not well receive (Woyiwada).

Several full-time programs talked about the importance of including essential skills, employability skills and life skills/enhancement in their programming (Crone, Lindberg, O'Rourke, Houle-Steinhauer, Woyiwada). Part-time community based programs were more likely to look at financial literacy, computer literacy and life skills (Tyler-Moon). A couple of programs with a focus of combining literacy with employment talked about how difficult it was to get industry partners to recognize the value of the program (Houle-Steinhauer, Lindberg).

The use of incentives for part-time and voluntary programs ranged from grocery and gas vouchers, (Lacombe) to getting a computer once four levels (including computer literacy) were attained (Johns-Gladue), to a library membership (Tyler-Moons).

A family literacy advocate talked about how children are very important in Aboriginal communities. People would do anything for their children (Flett). Sometimes parents are self-conscious of their own reading ability and don't participate in family literacy for that reason (Flett). Engaging in literacy for their children hooked parents in ways that they missed when their children's age meant the parents were no longer eligible to participate (Lacombe).

Both full-time and part-time programs are often self-paced (Dore, Johns-Gladue, Larsen). Students who have come from a very regimented and dictated learning regime have to relearn this new method, but once adopted it is appreciated (Crone). Often programs provided flexible intake (Woyiwada) and extra time to complete (Sacher). One instructor had some students participate in a more rigorously scheduled course through the internet, and though they found it challenging, there were able to keep up. She wondered if people were taking the extra time to complete because they could, or whether it was really needed or not (Woyiwada). Another talked about the importance of individualized learning plans (McPhee).

Some people learn better by doing. This was accommodated in a number of ways. One program talked about having students move around, cutting up pieces of sentences and putting them together again and acting out concepts (Dore). Others talked about interactive field trips to stores to use shopping coupons, to the bank and to the library (Tyler-Moon). One relatively isolated reserve community takes field trips to a not-to-distant city to read menus and use the transit system (Woyiwada). In another case it involved working in partnerships with a bank and toastmasters (Radley). Part of this is about exposure to a broader and less familiar world (McPhee). It is also about working with community partners.

For students returning to full-time studies, orientation is important. It can include things such as learning how to be a student again, study skills, managing time, computer uses and abuses, organizing a binder, what to do at lunch, etc. (Dore, Sacher).

There was a mixed response in terms of where to meet people to encourage their participation in part-time literacy programs. One suggested neutral territory or even at home is helpful (Schram). However another suggested that because of the loss of culture some people are very protective and private and visiting their homes would not be suitable (Flett). One part-time program uses a very flexible approach involving home visits, texts and phone calls by local facilitators to follow-up with participants (Johns-Gladue, Larsen).

Several people talked about attendance as an issue in full-time programs. Attendance is critical to success. Certainly having someone local follow-up with people helps (McPhee). Someone described the two models being used in different scenarios. Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) and Service Canada generally tie the training allowance amount to attendance, whereas the Alberta Employment and Immigration model gives a monthly living allowance at the

beginning of the month much like social assistance. The first model is valued more by participants (Lindberg) and is practiced with local adaptations in other places (Woyiwada).

Other wise practices that people noted were how important the space set-up is suggesting that it be open and inviting with round tables (Dore). One talked about consistency (McPhee) and another about repetition (Woyiwada). One found that students enjoyed making up questions that would “stump” other students to add some fun to the class (Petrie).

Before I close this section on programming, I want to make note that I spoke briefly with several people doing literacy programming in communities where there is a high population of Aboriginal people in the towns and regions that they serve. Many spoke about how they had an abundance of immigrants learning in their programs however Aboriginal people rarely sought their services and, when they did, often did not follow through. This despite their efforts of outreach in places like friendship centres or their strategic locations near native counselling services offices.

The ingenuity and responsiveness of people working in Aboriginal literacy is well represented in this review of some of the best features of programs in the province. It is my hope that this section will help people to reflect on their practices to see if there might be other good ideas that they can incorporate. There are definitely strengths to build upon.

Other Considerations

There is a big gap for people who attempt to enter full-time Adult Basic Education programs and comprehensive community institutions, but do not score high enough to meet entrance requirements. Often these individuals are ready, willing and able to attend full-time studies. Unfortunately, they are often referred back to part-time community programs which do not fully meet their needs (Collinge, Eek). An example someone shared was a young woman who left her remote reserve to attend college in the nearest community, because she wanted to train to be a nurse. Unfortunately, she didn't have the required literacy to begin upgrading in a full-time program, and had no way of supporting herself in the community to which she had moved to pursue her training. In the Living Literacy document it talks about the need to “introduce new approaches to increase the numbers of adults participating in foundation literacy programs including ... access to tuition, books, supplies and income support” (page 7). Filling this gap would certainly be a start.

Another entry point for literacy training is by supporting school aged children with homework (O'Rourke). Aboriginal parents are less likely to ask for assistance in the school when they are unable to help their children with their homework, however they often have the desire (Petrie). One community had a program for parents helping with homework, which led to a recognition of the need for further literacy work in the community (O'Rourke). This is an invitation to work together with the schools.

There are two ongoing initiatives that bear mentioning as they are relevant to this work. The first is the Community Learning participatory research through Athabasca University that is

consulting with Aboriginal communities in Northern Alberta about their learning needs (Edge). The second is Aboriginal elder consultation work being by Calgary Learns (Poole).

CONCLUSION

Certainly adult literacy within an Aboriginal context has unique characteristics. Some of the work being done draws on strengths in communities. Support is needed to respond to the need effectively with appropriate, community-based solutions. The use of benchmarks may be one of those tools.

APPENDICES

- 1. Committee members contacted to develop list**
- 2. List of those not consulted**
- 3. List of those consulted**
- 4. Power point presentation**
- 5. Benchmarks**
- 6. Consultation notes**