

**FIRST NATIONS
LITERACY
IN
ONTARIO**

By: Priscilla George

First Nations Literacy in Ontario

The Vision

First Nations envision a world in which their people can enjoy a good quality of life where they make informed and healthy decisions and they can participate meaningfully in the events that impact on them. They learn to be the best they can be – spiritually, emotionally, mentally and physically. It is a vision where First Nations people are empowered and have a positive cultural identity that is essential to their effective functioning, both in the First Nations and the non-First Nations worlds. Literacy is the foundation for this vision.

In declaring the ten-year period starting January 1, 2003 an International Literacy Decade, the United Nations had this to say about literacy:

“...it is convinced that literacy is crucial to the acquisition, by every child, youth and adult of essential life skills that enable them to address the challenges they can face in life and represents an essential step in basic education, which is an indispensable means for effective participation in the societies and economies of the twenty-first century...”¹

Literacy and Its Impacts

What is literacy and how does it affect our every day lives? Both the government of Ontario and the government of Canada see literacy as the ability to access and use information, usually in print format in the two official languages of this country – English and French.

Let us take a walk through a fairly typical day of a First Nations person, and relate this to how a person with effective literacy skills copes, as well as how a person with low literacy skills as defined by the provincial and federal governments is challenged.

At the start of the day, people with a digital clock are fine. Those who have a clock with hands and the twelve numbers and are literate know how much time they have before either the school bus comes, a ride for work arrives, or they have to leave for an appointment. Those with literacy challenges often have to rely on “guess-timating”, which itself is a skill.

Literate adults are able to make sure their children have everything they need for school, that is, completed homework, a signed permission form for a school trip, an appointment made to discuss a report card, or the time set aside to participate in a school function for their children. Parents with low literacy skills would most likely want to help their children with homework but would have difficulty and may not want to say so. Similarly, they may be inclined to miss an appointment on Parent-Teachers night, not because they want to but because they may not have been able to read the note. Or, they may be uncomfortable in a school setting, feeling they may not be able to participate knowledgeably in the discussion.. They may find a way to be busy with something else. They may sign the permission form for a school trip or a school function but not be aware of what they are signing.

¹ United Nations. United Nations Literacy Decade: education for all: International Plan of Action: implementation of General Assembly resolution 56/116.

People with health issues have differing ways of dealing with their illness, depending on their level of literacy. Those who are literate may have a lot of helpful information about the causes and symptoms, what to expect and if they have alternatives to surgery or medication such as natural remedies as recommended by a traditional healer. They would follow their plan of care and manage their symptoms or even return to good health. Those with low literacy skills may just accept what the doctor says, ask no questions as to options and may take the wrong doses of medication or the correct prescription at the wrong time.

Adults with effective literacy skills are more likely to be employed, and to have opportunities for advancement. Those with low literacy skills have more challenges in finding a job beyond seasonal work at minimum wage.

Those with low literacy skills as defined by the provincial and federal government have many other abilities. They learn to be very creative in finding ways to cover up their inability to use the written word as well as they would like. They may even have a lot of information gained from experience, rather than through the written word, and be able to discuss the topic at hand while avoiding reading or writing about it. They may get friends or relatives to assist them with documents, saying either that they have forgotten their glasses or that their eyes are bothering them that day. They may even find trusted people to whom they go with such documents. In a classroom setting, they may act up so as to avoid a test or an assignment, finding it easier to be seen as having a behaviour problem rather than somebody who has difficulty reading or writing.

Such persons may have a whole host of valuable knowledge and skills, such as how to hunt and trap, how to care for a family on a limited budget and how to use natural remedies to more effectively deal with an illness rather than using the ways of the western medical system, such as pills and operations. They may have skills gained outside of the classroom, such as in volunteer activities in the community.

For children, the impacts of literacy are even more crucial. Their literacy levels are a huge determinant in success in school. The drop-out rate in the First Nations communities are of concern and literacy levels may be a factor. However, long before the physical drop-out happens, there may be the emotional drop-out; that is, the student may not be engaged in the classroom activities. It takes an observant teacher and a good support system for both the teacher and the student to identify the problem and to be able to do something about it in a timely way. Such interventions have resulted in a good education leading to individual empowerment and/or community development.

The Current Situation for First Nations Literacy

A First Nations literacy movement, as part of the larger Aboriginal literacy campaign, has been active in Ontario and Canada for a number of years. For instance, ten First Nations communities in Ontario have delivered community-based, learner-centred literacy programs with Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) funding from the Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (MTCU) for at least ten years. Those programs are:

1. Chippewas of Georgina Island;
2. Chippewas of Sarnia;
3. Mississauga # 8;
4. Mohawk Nation of Akwesasne;

5. Chippewas of Nawash;
6. M'Chigeeng;
7. Nipissing;
8. Chippewas of Saugeen;
9. Six Nations of the Grand River Territory; and
10. Wasauksing.

Funding

While students in compulsory education have access to some resources to address their literacy issues, there are only three possible funding sources for Aboriginal adult literacy programming on-reserve in Ontario.

1. provincially – the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities, Literacy and Basic Skills Investment Branch (LBS);
2. federally – the Human Resources and Skills Development, National Literacy Secretariat (NLS) ; and,
3. Other.

Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) Funding

The major funder is the Ontario MTCU, through their LBS Branch. . The focus of the LBS program is “*provid(ing) students and trainees with the knowledge and skills essential to succeed in the global economy*”.² In practice, the focus is on preparing adult learners for the workplace/workforce. LBS has four distinct funding streams: Anglophone; Francophone; Aboriginal; and, Deaf. Ontario is the only province/territory in Canada with an Aboriginal “envelope” for literacy funding.

LBS currently provides core funding to 27 (twenty-seven) Aboriginal literacy delivery agencies, which includes the 10 (ten) aforementioned First Nation communities. In addition, MTCU funds 2 (two) support and service organizations – the Ontario Native Literacy Coalition (ONLC) and the Ningwakwe Learning Press (NLP), both of which service First Nations communities.

Over the past seventeen years since the inception of the LBS grants program, nine programs have been de-funded. Eight of those were First Nations programs. It is not known if the communities had any influence or control in maintaining their programs because there has not been a study of the demise of those programs.

The total LBS funding (operating and project funding combined) for 2003-04 was \$2,066,326.00 for the twenty-seven programs, plus two service agencies described later in this chapter. The total number of LBS learners served was 1,447. The range of funding for First Nations programs is from \$32,000 to \$80,000 annually, the primary factors of which is their number of contact hours³ Some practitioners work only part-time because of the level of funding. A September 2004 telephone survey by the author of this chapter indicates that, without exception, the First

² Literacy and Basic Skills – Guidelines Queen’s Printer for Ontario. Revised 2001. 1-2.

³ Telephone survey by the author of this chapter, September 2004. The contact hours with learners range from 3500 – 7500 per year for these amounts.

Nations practitioners feel the amount of funding they receive is woefully inadequate to carry out the delivery and administrative aspects that an effective program requires.

In order to continue to receive their LBS funding, Aboriginal literacy programs must adhere to certain criteria. They must document contact hours in each of the following categories:

1. Information and Referral
2. Intake and assessment
3. Training Plan Development
4. Training
5. Follow-up and Evaluation

Each learner in the program must have a Training Plan, in which their progress is documented according to success and transition markers. Those milestones are contained in Working with Learning Outcomes: A Validation Draft, Queen's Printer for Ontario, 1998, commonly referred to as the Learning Outcomes Matrix. The Matrix "*uses the descriptions of skills and knowledge in the Ontario curriculum, grades one to eight, 1997.*" (p. 1). The domains of the Matrix are: Communications; Numeracy; and, Self-Management. One such domain, Self-Direction, is primarily concerned with Readiness to Learn.

Monthly statistical reporting, semi-annual monitoring visits from a government field consultant, an annual business plan, an outcomes-based reporting structure and participation in the broader community's literacy planning process are all requirements of funding.⁴

One further compounding issue is that applicants to Ontario Works (OW) must submit to mandatory literacy testing. If their test results show that their literacy levels are not at a level deemed to be satisfactory to seek and keep employment, they are required to participate in a literacy program. The rationale for this condition may be to expose the OW recipient to literacy programming in the hopes of improving their chances of getting and keeping a job, thus improving their quality of life. However, such a scenario often makes for an unwilling participant in the literacy program. Aboriginal literacy practitioners believe that this unwillingness can pose a barrier to learning. They have to be extremely creative to address the attitudes of such learners, as well as the attitudes of the OW case-workers.

National Literacy Secretariat (NLS)

Aboriginal organizations and communities may access funds through the National Literacy Secretariat (NLS). A few of the aforementioned programs do so to augment their core funding from MTCU. NLS provides one-time only pilot project funding in the following categories:

1. The development of learning materials;
2. Research;
3. The improvement of access and outreach;
4. The improvement of coordination and information-sharing; and,
5. Increased public awareness.⁵

⁴ Johnny, Michael. Draft Masters-Thesis-in-Progress on Aboriginal Literacy in Ontario. April 2004.

⁵ <http://www.nald.ca/nls/nlsfund/guide/funding.htm#2>

Practitioners must be adept at wording the required annual proposals so that each one appears to be a new project. Most of the First Nations benefiting from the LBS programs do not access NLS funding, citing reasons such as not being properly informed about Calls for Proposals or lack of time to do the work necessary to research and to write a proposal, and generally because of the administrative demands of the LBS system. Practitioners have stated over the years that they do not have the command of the terminology government seems to require to describe their community-based, learner-centred ideas. In cases where they are able to overcome that barrier, the extra responsibility for administering the project, as well as writing the financial, interim and final reports, is a heavy burden for small organizations.

Other

The other possible funding sources are Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC), the Local Delivery Mechanisms (LDMs) ⁶, and local fundraising efforts on the part of individual programs/communities.

One First Nations literacy program provided a rationale to INAC for a pilot of an adult literacy program in 2003-2004. The coordinator's observation is that while she uses parts of the LBS guidelines in the program, she is able to spend more time with the learners because there is not the heavy administrative burden as experienced in the LBS program.⁷ INAC has renewed its funding for the second phase of the pilot, but at a reduced amount. The coordinator has submitted a proposal to the Trillium Foundation to continue the program for another three years. Trillium has asked them to re-submit for one year. In between funding gaps, the program operates through dollars re-allocated at the band level. Including positions and activities provided by Ontario Works and the band, funding for this program comes to approximately \$100,000 a year.

One urban-based literacy program serves learners from the nearby First Nations. The coordinator was able to access funding from the Local Delivery Mechanism to work with students on preparation for their General Education Diploma (GED). This activity is not eligible under current LBS criteria but is a stated goal of many learners accessing literacy programs.⁸

Finally, many programs sponsor local fundraising initiatives. These fundraising events more often than not involve the learner. Such initiatives include raffles (in which the learners make a quilt or collect donations from local sponsors) and bake sales (in which the learners prepare the food, price it and sell it.). Though such events are time-intensive for the amount of money actually raised, practitioners believe that these events assist the learners in enhancing their literacy-related skills. They also raise the awareness of literacy programming in the community. Most importantly, the literacy programs are able to use the dollars raised for initiatives that do not meet the criteria of other funding sources, e.g., field trips.

Principles of First Nations Literacy

The literacy programs of the ten First Nations communities have incorporated a number of principles in Aboriginal literacy that are drawn from;

⁶ The LDMs were established during the PATHWAYS TO SUCCESS federal Aboriginal employment and training strategy. These organizations have developed considerable expertise in the delivery of employment and training programs and services to Aboriginal people over the past several years.

⁷ Personal Communication. Site visit to the Wikwemikong Ontario Works Literacy Program. July 2003.

⁸ Telephone communication. Literacy Program Coordinator. March 22, 2004.

- documents produced by Aboriginal organizations in the 1990 International Literacy Year (Native Adult Education Resource Centre, Salmon Arm, B.C.; Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs, House of Commons; Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies, Saskatoon; Assembly of First Nations; National Association of Friendship Centres; and, Gabriel Dumont Institute of Native Studies and Applied Research Inc.);
- input from the participants in the Native Literacy Communications Certificate Course - done as a partnership arrangement between the Ontario Native Literacy Coalition (ONLC) and the First Nations Technical Institute (FNTI); and,
- the 1996 Native Literacy Planning Process, also by the ONLC.

Those principles are:

1. Ensure that programs are community-based and learner-centred, incorporating the strengths, needs and aspirations of individuals and communities;
2. Use the holistic approach to literacy/education, which recognizes that each and every person has Spirit, Heart, Mind and Body and it is important to recognize and nurture all four parts.
3. Place literacy into culture, rather than fitting culture into literacy; that is, use culture-based and/or culturally-relevant resources and methodologies to shape the program rather than simply adding cultural components onto a system based on non-Aboriginal approaches;
4. Use the dual forces of language and culture to help First Nations communities sustain and maintain a positive cultural identity. First Nations Peoples have been through an educational system that was based on non-First Nations culture and language, which could be a factor in many of them feeling that their cultures and languages are not as important and that they are inferior to the mainstream culture;
5. Develop and use materials and methodologies that are relevant to the learners' lives rather than use resources that are based on concepts foreign to First Nations communities; e.g., streetcars;
6. Empower learners in relationship to self, family, community and nation so that they are able to interact meaningfully with other people rather than to isolate themselves from people and events;
7. Contribute to community development (economic, social, educational, political and spiritual) so that people can make informed decisions to participate in all areas that affect their lives.⁹

Some additional First Nations principles of literacy are:

- Access to adequate literacy programs by all segments of First Nations on-demand or as required and that they be delivered in the community
- Literacy programs are integrated into the fabric and are strongly linked to other institutions of the community
- Everyone respects and supports First Nations languages literacy as being equal to English and French.
- Adequate funding available on multi-year basis
- First Nations control over funding and programs
- Administrative portion of programs well supported¹⁰

Further, the author of this chapter has heard the following from personal interaction with First Nations literacy practitioners over the past seventeen years:

⁹ Priscilla George. Vision Guiding Native Literacy. Ningwakwe Clearing House, Owen Sound, Ontario. 1998.

¹⁰ Beverly Anne Sabourin and Associates. The Language of Literacy: A National Resource Directory of Aboriginal Literacy Programs. Step-by-Step Early Learning Centre, Kahnawake First Nation. 1998.

- i) heal the spirit first – build self-confidence, self-esteem¹¹
- ii) restore/enhance a positive First Nations identity so they can go anywhere and be whatever they want to be
- iii) literacy is the foundation for many of the initiatives that are important in First Nations communities – economic development, healing and wellness, etc.

Simply, these principles amount to First Nations Control of First Nations Literacy. To paraphrase Marlene Brant Castellano, “The revitalization of Native communities has been linked closely to control over education (read literacy).¹² That is, it is **crucial** that First Nations literacy be defined by First Nations on First Nations terms, along with the decision as to what constitutes success.

The Government of Ontario, mainly through the Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) Branch, controls the definition of literacy. This is contrary to the concept of “*Aboriginal control of Aboriginal education.*”

Aboriginal literacy practitioners believe that Learners’ self-esteem and self-confidence have been eroded by the failure of the institutional educational system to take into account factors that impact on their ability to learn, process and retain that learning. Re-building self-esteem and self-confidence is foundational to the work in Aboriginal literacy programs. Such re-building involves the written word in English. The practitioners would welcome an opportunity to expand upon the current provincial and governmental definition of literacy.

Aboriginal Literacy Levels

Adults

Presently, there are no statistics on literacy levels for First Nations adults. In the meantime, First Nations use educational attainment levels to identify trends in First Nations literacy. The 1991 Aboriginal Post-Censal Survey indicated that 26.9% of adults, aged 15-49, who identified as Northern American Indian on-reserve in Ontario, reported no formal schooling or less than grade 9 as their highest level of education (as compared to the Canadian total of 6%).¹³

Currently, learners in First Nations literacy programs may be described as people from all age groups (youth, adults, even Elders) seeking to develop their skills with the written word in English for a wide variety of reasons, most notable of which is the desire to improve their quality of life. They may want to get jobs, better jobs or start their own businesses. They may want to help their children in school. They may want to be able to handle their business affairs themselves rather than relying on somebody else to do it for them.

¹¹ National Aboriginal Design Committee. Position Paper on Aboriginal Literacy. October 2002. Appendix B-1; Best Practices in Native Literacy Symposium 2002.

¹² Marlene Brant-Castellano, Lynne Davis and Louise Lahache eds., Aboriginal Education: Fulfilling the Promise. Back Cover (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2000)

¹³ George, Priscilla. Position Paper on Program Reform. Ontario Native Literacy Coalition. Owen Sound, 1998. p. 5

In the early 1990s, the Ontario Native Literacy Coalition developed this definition of literacy:

Native literacy is a tool which empowers the spirit of Native people. Native literacy services recognize and affirm the unique cultures of Native peoples and the interconnectedness of all creation. As part of a life-long path of learning, Native literacy contributes to the development of self-knowledge and critical thinking. It is a continuum of skills that encompass reading, writing, numeracy, speaking, good study habits, and communicating in other forms of language as needed. Based on the experience, abilities and goals of the learners, Native literacy fosters and promotes achievement and a sense of purpose, which are both central to self-determination¹⁴.

While this definition does not specifically include Aboriginal languages, Aboriginal peoples believe the culture and language are inseparable. In fact, some First Nations literacy programs were able to operate Aboriginal language components in the early years of provincial basic skills funding. The increasingly stringent funding criteria currently in place has made this next to impossible.

Funders generally focus on written and/or spoken information. Many Aboriginal Peoples believe that we have the right to be literate in our own languages. Some even go further to postulate Aboriginal types of literacies. One person was asked by Parkland Regional College, Saskatchewan, to assign a type of literacy to each colour of the rainbow to demonstrate that, in the Aboriginal community, there are many types of literacies, only one of which is the written word in English and French. Those literacies are:

- Red – Aboriginal language literacy;
- Orange – those skills associated with functioning in an oral culture – speaking, listening, reflecting;
- Yellow – the ways in which we express ourselves beyond the written word, such as artwork, the use of color, sound/music (drumming, dancing, singing);
- Green – English and/or French language literacy;
- Blue – using technology (computers, phones, banking machines)
- Indigo – symbolic literacy, such as those symbols encountered in dreams, visions, ceremony, everyday life (for example, coincidence, the sighting of a bird/animal...). This type of literacy has been referred to in some circles as “*literacy of the universe*”.¹⁵
- Violet – the daily actions in literacy programs which contribute to the healing of participants – treating them like a whole person.

The focus of the provincial and federal government definition of literacy on facility with the written word in English and French, to the exclusion of all the other types of literacies, has contributed to a stigma about low literacy skills. Many learners come to First Nations literacy programs feeling that they have failed. Actually it is the system, through its narrow definition of literacy, that has failed to recognize the strengths that learners already have and that literacy is only another skill to add to their repertoire.

¹⁴ Michael Johnny, Policy Implications for Native Literacy in Ontario – A Thesis Submitted to the Committed on Graduate Studies in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in the Faculty of Arts and Science, Trent University, Trent University, Peterborough, Ontario, May 2005

¹⁵ Aboriginal traditional teacher, Janice Longboat, closing comments, first day of Best Practices in Aboriginal Literacy Symposium, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, May 2002.

Elementary Schools

While there is mandatory literacy testing in Grades 3 and 6 in Ontario elementary school system, the boards of education have no statistics on literacy rates of First Nations students because the students don't have to self-identify¹⁶. However, some First Nations educators are reporting that children are having difficulty passing the Grade 3 and 6 literacy tests. It must be noted that non-First Nations children are having similar difficulty.

What are the factors leading to the difficulty many young students experience while trying to pass the literacy tests? The following list is not meant to be exhaustive. It provides information that relates to the recommendations section:

- a mismatch of the teaching styles of the teachers and the learning styles of the students;
- lack of knowledge on the part of the teachers on the issues in the First Nations communities that may affect students' attendance, participation in class, and ability to learn;
- Initially, it was the requirement for First Nations Peoples to make the transition from an oral culture to a literate culture. Later, an influx of computer usage led to the need to be literate in the use of the new information technology to keep up with its advancements. Children and youth are exposed to computers in school from a young age. This new element changed the relationship between Elders and youth from a human level to one that must incorporate the use of computers. To record an Elder speaking, and produce an interactive CD-ROM based on the information is more likely to engage a student, than having them sit with the Elder to receive the same information.¹⁷
- Many students learn to speak English from English as a second language. These are the people with whom First Nations students interact in the majority of their life, that is, people who are removed from the academic system. The non-standard and standard versions of English have different grammatical construction. The variance causes problems, not only in testing, but also in general class work. A teacher who is not aware of this difference may perceive the student to be speaking "broken English". The students may be partially graded on their ideas but they are primarily graded on the way in which they present their ideas. That is, they may lose marks for improper grammar, but may have excellent conceptual skills.¹⁸
- Standardized tests are often developed based on concepts typical to a certain race, class, gender and socio-economic status.¹⁹ By and large, First Nations students do not fit that criteria and they may have different knowledge based on their own experiences. This is not recognized or validated in standardized tests.

First Nations educators are making valiant efforts to do something about the unsatisfactory test results of their students in the mandatory literacy testing. There is a province-wide initiative in this regard for all students. In 2003, the Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (MTCU) developed the Early Reading Strategy. An Expert Panel of 22 (twenty-two) professionals reviewed and discussed a wide range of research on reading to produce a report that

Comment [a1]:

Comment [a2]:

Comment [a3]:

¹⁶ Telephone interview, MTCU staff, Audrey James, Thunder Bay office, Tuesday, March 16, 2004.

¹⁷ E-mail communication, Dobi-Dawn Frenette, Director of Education, Anishinaabeg of Kabapikotawangag Resource Council Inc., March 22, 2004.

¹⁸ ibid

¹⁹ ibid

outlines effective instruction and defines good practices for teaching reading to all children in Ontario.²⁰

As a part of this Strategy, MTCU developed scripted train-the-trainer sessions for teachers in the public school system to enable teachers to teach/enhance the reading skills of the students. The sessions were not based on the provincial curriculum. Rather, they were based on the findings of the Expert Panel. Participants experienced interactive modules on topics such as:

- Achieving and Sustaining Improvement;
- Effective Reading Instruction;
- Assessment: and,
- Classroom Organization.

While many on-reserve schools follow the provincial curriculum, they were, by and large, not a part of this training with one notable exception. The Northern Aboriginal Education Circle (NAEC) works with 61 (sixty-one) First Nations schools in Northwestern Ontario. The NAEC was able to access dollars from Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) for teachers in those schools to enhance the achievement of First Nations students in schools. They used some of the dollars for their teachers and principals to participate in the train-the-trainer sessions in Thunder Bay in September 2003.

NAEC conducted a survey at this session to see what further supports teachers and principals needed in their home schools/communities. The NAEC participants seemed pleased to be accessing this training. However, it is too soon to assess the impact the session has had on the teaching and learning in First Nations schools.

Secondary Schools

Some First Nations literacy practitioners noted that First Nations youth are often encouraged to go to high school but they do not have the academic levels/literacy skills to be successful²¹. Their observation is that the high schools keep the students until the nominal roll date after which the schools can keep the dollars allocated for the numbers of students enrolled at that date. Following that date, there is a perception that mainstream teachers are not as supportive of the students.

Supports to First Nations Literacy in Ontario

The following three Aboriginal literacy organizations deliver support to Aboriginal literacy programs in Ontario that are community-based and learner-centred. The focus of such programs is not to replicate the institutional education that failed First Nations peoples in the first place. Rather, they respond to community and learner needs and aspirations by providing supports that are culture-based. The percentage of funding and/or time dedicated to First Nations is not collected by the organizations. This may be an issue that could be addressed by tracking systems developed in the future.

²⁰ Ontario Ministry of Education. Early Reading Strategy, The Report of the Expert Panel on Reading in Ontario, 2003, p. 3

²¹ Telephone interview, Christianna Jones, Native Literacy Coordinator, Wikwemikong Works Adult Literacy Program, March 18, 2004.

The Ontario Native Literacy Coalition (ONLC)

The ONLC was established in 1988 in response to the need of the LBS-funded coordinators of Aboriginal programs to network with each other to share ideas and to support each other in program development.

MTCU provides core funding to the ONLC. This funding enables the ONLC to retain one full-time Executive Director.

In addition, the ONLC receives project funding either through LBS or through a cost-shared initiative with LBS and NLS. The funding varies from year to year.²² The ONLC uses such projects to provide training to practitioners and learners in the 27 (twenty-seven) aforementioned programs in areas identified by the practitioners.

One challenge for the ONLC is that MTCU and NLS “develop priorities that support government directions and initiatives and that reflect needs identified by literacy agencies.”²³ Because the Aboriginal programs constitute such a small number of the over 200 literacy delivery agencies²⁴, their needs often get brushed aside as not constituting a large enough percentage of the total client base. The effect of this is that the needs of the Aboriginal community do not get reflected in the yearly priorities for funding.

Current priorities include:

1. building capacity for serving learners with employment goals;
2. integrating essential skills into LBS programming;
3. promoting the use of technology to support flexible learning environments; and,
4. empirical research. (MTCU letter to the literacy field, March 5, 2004).

At first glance these goals seem laudable. However, upon closer examination, the first two priorities focus on employment. Aboriginal practitioners, particularly in First Nations communities, believe that it is not practical to guarantee employment to a learner upon completion of a literacy program. The socio-economic reality is that few jobs exist for anyone regardless of skills. Often, individuals have to leave their community to get employment, which raises a whole set of new issues. For example, individuals in those cases no longer have the assistance of their local support system and they experience culture shock and racism. Furthermore, many First Nations LBS programs are working with Elders who are past the employment age. Their learning goal is simply to improve their quality of life.

In the meantime, the ONLC struggles to meet the needs and aspirations of First Nations learners and communities while fitting those needs and aspirations into the annual MTCU priorities.

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²² Telephone communication, Ellen Paterson, ONLC Executive Director, March 18, 2004.

²³ Letter to the literacy field from MTCU dated March 5, 2004.

²⁴ Working with Learning Outcomes: A Validation Draft. Queen’s Printer for Ontario. 1998. 1

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Ningwakwe Learning Press (NLP)

MTCU also provides core funding to the Ningwakwe Learning Press (NLP), which produces Aboriginal literacy materials. *NLP is dedicated to developing and providing Native learning materials and services that are culturally appropriate for Native people.*²⁵

In addition, NLP accesses funds through the NLS to produce materials and to provide culture-based information-sharing sessions on how to use those materials. NLP tracks information from the Aboriginal literacy field in a variety of ways to decide which materials to produce. The information-sharing sessions are for the NLP membership, some of whom are ONLC members. The sessions also include others with a stake in First Nations literacy and education, such as learners, educators, language teachers, etc.

Furthermore, NLP generates funds through its book sales and print-on-demand services. These sources of funding enable NLP to retain three full-time staff and two part-time staff. NLP has two other part-time staff through arrangements with the Huronia Area Aboriginal Management Board as well as the YMCA.

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National Indigenous Literacy Association (NILA)

NILA's mandate is to be the eyes, ears, and voice of Aboriginal literacy in Canada, and will reflect the Spirit and values of Aboriginal Peoples and nations in all of its work.

NILA is committed to providing Aboriginal culture-based services which address strategic and developmental gaps in Aboriginal literacy. Its two main service functions are to:

- Provide a strategic networking and advocacy forum for Aboriginal literacy stakeholders;
- Facilitate research and development projects, and other supports for Aboriginal literacy.

In October 2002, NILA presented its Position Paper on Aboriginal Literacy to representatives of the federal government, which included Members of Parliament and Senators, as well as to the Standing Committee on Human Resources Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities, February 2003. The Position Paper can be accessed at www.nald.ca/fulltext/position/position/pdf

From January 30, 2003 to the 6th of May, 2003, the Standing Committee on Human Resources Development and Persons with Disabilities undertook a study on adult literacy. The resulting

²⁵ <http://www.ningwakwe.on.ca/rolestatement.html>

report, "Raising Adult Literacy Skills: The Need for a Pan-Canadian Response",²⁶ was tabled in the House of Commons, June 2003. It made several comprehensive recommendations for Aboriginal literacy.

The Government of Canada's Response was non-committal, relegating Aboriginal literacy to such comments as "*The Government of Canada agrees that the unique literacy needs of the Aboriginal population require a strategic approach, and it is actively working towards this objective. One important strategic approach is to incorporate literacy into broader skill development and employment strategies for Aboriginal people.*"²⁷

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Host Organizations/Communities

Where the host organization/community of a First Nations literacy program is supportive of the program, it thrives. More often than not, First Nations literacy practitioners feel that their host organization and the First Nations leaders place a higher priority on other issues, such as self-determination, economic development, healing and wellness (Elders, families, youth, residential school syndrome...), etc. There seems to be a failure to fully appreciate that literacy is a foundation to more effectively address those issues.

It should be noted that some First Nations communities provide in-kind support to the literacy program in the way of office space and hydro to offset the shortfall in funding. Three of the ten First Nations practitioners work part-time because of the inadequate LBS funding allocation.. One practitioner even uses her own personal business to partially fund two necessary staff positions in the program.²⁸

Best Practices

Over the years, a number of best practices have emerged in First Nations adult literacy programs. It is important to note that all of the best practices outlined below incorporate the strengths, interests and aspirations of First Nations learners and communities. They address the spiritual, emotional, mental and physical aspects of participants. They facilitate a positive cultural identity in learners, by basing activities in First Nations cultures.

Prior Learning Assessment (Holistic Approach)

The Ohahase Literacy Program, out of the First Nations Technical Institute (FNTI), Mohawks of Bay of Quinte Territory, program piloted two Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) Portfolio Development Programs with learners in its own community, as well as a third with learners in an urban-based program. The instructor asked learners to document their life experiences, that is,

²⁶ <http://www.parl.gc.ca/InfoComDoc/37/2/HUMA/Studies/Reports/humarp03-e.html>

²⁷ www.hrhc-drhc.gc.ca/dept/reports/responses/031105/5_e.shtml

²⁸ Telephone communication. First Nations literacy practitioner. September 14, 2004.

learning that took place outside of the classroom – through volunteer and employment activities, life roles, etc. They gathered evidence in the form of reference and confirmation letters, certificates, as well as samples of work to support and/or demonstrate their learning and ability to perform. Participants learned to articulate their competencies and to recognize transferable skills and knowledge that could be applied in employment-related training and/or learning plan development. They examined their relationship to self, family, clan, community, nation, confederacy, Creation and universe. Such exploration provided a forum where cultural knowledge and practices were shared and valued, sometimes for the first time. Occasionally, both learners and facilitators shared very personal and emotional incidents in their lives, in order to reflect on the learning that resulted from those incidents. Such a process showed that learners and facilitators are equals and it encouraged learner empowerment, personal growth and an improved self-image. In addition, learners established ownership and control over their own learning. All of these activities stimulated reflective thinking and self-assessment, which are necessary for creating self-directed learners, as well as enhancing their self-esteem. It created an environment where multiple barriers to learning were identified. The practitioners could then address these barriers through program design and delivery.²⁹ This project no longer receives LBS funding.

Aboriginal Language Literacy

Joanne Boyer, Enjikendaasaang Learning Centre, Mississauga # 8 First Nation, has been creative in developing learning activities that are fun, culture-based, incorporate the language yet meet the MTCU learning outcomes. Joanne observes the learners in their daily interactions. She is able to ascertain their strengths and interests. Many learners had some degree of fluency in Anishnawbemowin, and would use the language to explain English concepts to each other. One such learner was the only person in the community who knew how to tan deer hides. The practitioner asked the rest of the learners if they wanted to learn how to tan deer hides. They answered in the affirmative. The practitioner and her co-worker then identified the Anishnawbemowin words that they would need to carry out the activity. The class listed the words on flip charts along with their English equivalents. They were thus developing their literacy skills in Anishnawbemowin and English. Over and over again, the learners practised the words. When it came time to do the activity, they switched to Anishnawbemowin only. Afterwards, they wrote stories in Anishnawbemowin as to parts of the activity that meant the most to them. The practitioner has replicated this procedure with other activities of interest as identified by the learners. Such an activity relates to the strengths and interests of the learners (the latter part of this sentence does not seem to make sense in relation to the first part and needs syntax improvement – please review) rather than to the deficit approach used in the mainstream system, which looks at a learners' needs (read lack).³⁰ This program is in its 17th year of operation.

Employability/Life Skills

Elva Lickers, Native Literacy Coordinator, the Six Nations Literacy Achievement Centre has combined life skills and literacy. The coordinator believes this is an effective means of addressing barriers with respect to life histories of trauma, and cites a 90% success level for

²⁹ National Aboriginal Design Committee. Position Paper on Aboriginal Literacy. October 2002. Appendix I

³⁰ Position Paper on Aboriginal Literacy. National Aboriginal Design Committee. October 2002. Appendix C

program participants for obtaining jobs, returning to school, or starting their own business.³¹ She postulates that the greatest barriers to literacy are mental, emotional and spiritual dysfunction. The coordinator has implemented the Insights Program, a 12-week supposedly pre-employment program, which is a self-discovery journey. It is a three-part program as follows:

- Instruction – Basic Parts of Speech, Word Groups, Types of Sentences, Spelling Rules, Punctuation Rules, Parts of Sentences, Basic Rules of Grammar, Basic Math, and Native Traditions
- Life Skills – Communication, Conflict Resolution, Reality Therapy, Assertiveness Training, Problem-Solving, Goal-Setting, Building Self-Esteem, Decision-Making, and Anger Management
- Assignments – Autobiography, Three Collages, GED Pre-test, Book Report, Resume, Career Interest Quiz, Essay Writing, Cover Letter, and Two Lesson Presentations

Learners report having more self-confidence and self-esteem as a result of this program. In addition, they have the necessary skills for employability and independence.³² This program is still in operation.

Technology

In order to address the stigma perceived by many learners in being seen attending literacy programs, many programs offer computer classes in which learners develop their reading and writing skills using a computer. In 1996, MTCU and the NLS initiated Phase I of AlphaRoute to gain knowledge of what learners experienced when they completed learning activities on the web. AlphaRoute is an on-line literacy curriculum. All aspects of Native AlphaRoute - the design, from curriculum content to visual layout and technical readiness have been developed with a vision toward meeting the needs of Aboriginal learners. A Committee made up entirely of Aboriginal Peoples advised the all Aboriginal staff throughout the project.

The Committee decided to focus on the self-management and self-direction domain of the Learning Outcomes Matrix. The Curriculum Developer chose the Teachings of the Seven Grandfathers and devised learning activities based on the Medicine Wheel to reflect the component outcomes of this domain. The learners could use the written word or art in their responses to the questions in the learning activities. AlphaRoute was then piloted in 3 (three) Aboriginal literacy programs – Peterborough Native Literacy Centre, Sioux-Hudson Literacy Council in Sioux Lookout, and Nokee Kwe Occupational Skill Development Inc., London (serving First Nations learners). In addition to the success in those three programs, AlphaRoute was cited by a non-Aboriginal practitioner at a Tri-County Link Workshop as “*one of the best programs I’ve ever seen.*”³³

First Nations Literacy Practitioners Add Cultural Elements to Programs

Through the holistic approach, Aboriginal literacy practitioners create a climate for learners that addresses the inequities of the institutional educational system, such as their failure to recognize and nurture Spirit, Heart, Mind and Body. The institutional system focussed primarily on the

³¹ Canadian Journal of Native Education, Volume 27, Number 1, 2003

³² *ibid*

³³ Telephone Interview with Bernice Ireland, Nokee Kwe Occupational Skill Development Inc., London, an urban-based Aboriginal literacy practitioner serving learners from the neighbouring First Nations community, March 18, 2004.

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Mind and possibly the Body (through physical education). First Nations believe this lack of recognition of Spirit and Heart is a contributing factor to the imbalance seen in First Nations individuals and communities, as evidenced in the statistics of suicide and alcohol and drug abuse.

The holistic approach relates to the four pillars of education as stated in the Hamburg Declaration: learning to know (mental), learning to do (physical), learning to live together (emotional) and learning to be (spiritual).³⁴

The aforementioned statistics indicate that there are blocks to learning. These statistics are symptoms of a larger malaise – the loss of a positive cultural identity and self-esteem. The Indian Act and the residential school system are but two factors that have contributed to this loss. Hence, First Nations literacy practitioners believe that it is paramount to use the holistic approach as the foundation to increased self-esteem and enhanced learning.

One of the ways in which they address self-esteem is to help learners feel good about being a First Nations person. The most common way is through culture-based learning activities, which sometimes are based in the First Nation language of the community.

The observation of First Nations literacy practitioners is that when learners start to feel good about their abilities and potential, their punctuality and attendance improves as does their class interaction. These aspects build a firmer foundation for enhanced reading and writing skills.

In a 1997 survey of Aboriginal literacy programs by the Ontario Native Literacy Coalition, and in a Focus Group on Aboriginal Literacy by the Ningwakwe Learning Press, Resort Tapatoo, November 2003, First Nations literacy practitioners summarized the following changes in learners that contributed to their success in literacy programs.

Spiritual (Attitudes or Insights)

Learners begin to feel they are worth something and they recognize their inner strength. This contributes to their ability to go from an unstable history to expecting something positive in their lives.

Emotional (Feelings about Self/Others)

Learners are able to ask for help more often with work or with issues that affect their lives. They are willing to take/accept criticism of their work and to help others.

Mental (Knowledge)

Learners are clearer about what they don't understand. They feel they are able to voice an opinion and they know it is okay to not agree with people. They know what is appropriate to share and when.

Physical (Skills)

Learners develop a willingness to attend the program sessions. This is evidenced in their punctuality and attendance. Learners phone when they can't attend. They participate in program activities such as Sharing Circles, class discussions, fundraising, and Learners' Conferences.

³⁴ CONFINTEA, ADULT EDUCATION, THE HAMBURG DECLARATION, THE AGENDA FOR THE FUTURE - UNESCO web-site, <http://www.unesco.org/education/uie/confintea/pdf/con5eng.pdf>

They make themselves understood in class and they respond to questions, either with a gesture or verbally. They do less blaming and take responsibility. Furthermore, they offer unsolicited information to the instructor and help other students. They make healthier decisions, such as taking more care with personal appearance. Learners are more likely to get on the right road, i.e., they stay out of trouble.

A Successful Literacy Program's Needs

In the aforementioned Focus Group, First Nations literacy practitioners had this to say about the key elements or characteristics of an ideal program:

- “...(we need) adequate funding, so that we’d have the resources to do what we know we have to do with the learners, to be able to affirm an Aboriginal identity, to increase their own sense of value, to address the factors that prevent their active participation in the program (including, but not limited to, childcare, transportation) without having to jump through hoops like the Ministry guidelines...”;
- able to give the learners the skills to put food on the table for their kids and to deal with the social problems that their kids have at school;
- prepare learners for technical trades, certification or whatever they identify as their goals;

These findings are consistent with those of a 1998 survey of more than 90 (ninety) Aboriginal-controlled literacy programs across Canada, which found that:

“...Aboriginal literacy programs which have “survived and thrived” have been those that have incorporated varying degrees of the following characteristics into their ongoing operations:

- a generally reliable and predictable source of funding
- a safe and welcoming learning environment
- sympathetic and supportive community leadership
- trained program staff and access to volunteers
- a program orientation which focuses on the learner as a whole person, with social, cultural, spiritual and physical abilities, needs and limitations, where the curriculum is oriented to the needs of the learner and which progresses solely on the basis of the students’ abilities
- a curriculum which is as “*culturally appropriate*” as is feasible for the learning objectives of the learner, relating to the community and cultural referents of the learner and incorporating materials that reinforce cultural values and identity
- access to learning aids other than curriculum
- initiatives which lessen or minimize physical and financial impediments to participation in a literacy program, such as the provision of day-care assistance, transportation to the program site, counselling³⁵

Issues/Gaps

Creating a Common Understanding of Literacy

The Aboriginal literacy field and LBS staff often use the same words, but each has a different interpretation of those words. For example, a review of field-based literature in Aboriginal

³⁵ Beverly Anne Sabourin and Associates. The Language of Literacy. A National Resource Directory of Aboriginal Literacy Programs. Step-by-Step Early Learning Centre, Kahnawake First Nation. 1998

literacy (1998, 2002) have found that ‘*literacy*’ is a problematic term about which government policy makers and First Nations communities have yet to fully agree.³⁶ There is no concurrence on the specific elements of literacy that should be measured or the means to measure them, despite the fact that the ONLC has consistently stated that the Ontario government’s definition/understanding of literacy, and how to measure progress/success is minimally relevant to the Aboriginal community, including First Nations

The current focus of LBS is to prepare literacy learners for the workplace/workforce, by enhancing their facility with the spoken and written word in the official languages of this province – English and French. First Nations literacy practitioners believe that literacy is much more than a workplace/workforce issue; rather, it’s a quality of life issue. They concur with the United Nations stance in “...*acknowledging the importance of a holistic, life-long and life-wide approach to literacy...*”³⁷ Further, the First Nations believe that there are many skills necessary for effective functioning in life. The spoken and written words are but two. The predilection of the funding agents to emphasize cognitive learning outcomes only exacerbates the stigma attached to participating in literacy programs. First Nations literacy practitioners teach learners to recognize their other skills/strengths and to see that literacy is only another skill that they can learn.

First Nations literacy practitioners have become adept at implementing the holistic approach to literacy, which enables them to meet the outcomes as outlined in the Learning Outcomes Matrix while also meeting a whole host of learning outcomes not included in the Matrix. The problem is the time it takes to state it in a way that the funder requires and/or understands.

Expanding the Definition of Literacy or Removing the Stigma Attached to Literacy

It is imperative that literacy be seen as yet another skill to be acquired in addition to the many skills that people already have. Currently, First Nations literacy practitioners are aware of many people who would benefit from the program. However, recruitment of learners is a problem because many people do not want to be seen participating in a literacy program. Once there, most learners report an increased sense of self, which contributes to their ability to learn and to retain that learning. As a result, they are able to achieve goals they heretofore thought were not possible. In addition, such learners often recruit family and friends into the literacy program.

Recognizing Aboriginal Language Literacy

Close to one-third of the Aboriginal literacy programs in Ontario had Aboriginal language components, at one point in time.³⁸ The practitioners had to be creative in this regard. Some of them accessed funding from the NLS while others allocated part of the LBS funding on the understanding that the Aboriginal Language Teacher was also incorporating literacy in English. Still others were able to get a volunteer from the community. Many of these programs have been de-funded. Only two remain in operation.

³⁶ Michael Johnny. Policy Implications for Native Literacy in Ontario: A Thesis Submitted to the Committee on Graduate Studies in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in the Faculty of Arts and Science, Trent University, Peterborough, Ontario. May 2005

³⁷ UNESCO. Discussion Paper – Literacy For All – A United Nations Literacy Decade. <http://www.unesco.org/education/litdecade/discussion.html> p. 13 or 24, 22.04.2002

³⁸ Empirical observation by the author of this chapter during seventeen years in Aboriginal literacy.

The stance of MTCU is that Aboriginal language literacy is examined on a case-by-case basis³⁹. The basic premise of this examination is that those participating in the Aboriginal Language component must be already fluent in their Mother Tongue and that they are learning to read and write in that language as a bridge to literacy in English as one of the official languages of Ontario. One need to be examined is the learner's degree of fluency in his/her Mother Tongue. Many First Nations people are passively bilingual in their First Nations language; that is, they understand the language, but they do not feel comfortable speaking it – a throwback to speaking the language in the home before being shipped to residential school where they were no longer allowed to speak it. Government policy was a huge factor in eradicating First Nations languages. Government policy must be equally a feature in restoring First Nations languages and identity.

Respecting the Practitioners, The Unsung Heroes of the Aboriginal Literacy Movement

Using the holistic approach to meet the needs and aspirations of learners/communities requires a very creative thinker, one who is willing to discharge multiple responsibilities and work long hours. The practitioners juggle time, dollars and resources and the amount of time they spend on administration is from 25% to 85%⁴⁰. For example, they track contact hours, prepare training plans and develop and document demonstrations. These are all requirements to maintain their ongoing LBS funding. Many programs have only one staff person who is responsible for the delivery and administrative aspects of the program. As a result, the turnover rate amongst Aboriginal literacy coordinators is high.

Currently, most Native literacy program budgets are less than \$50,000.⁴¹ Those amounts cover both administration and delivery. The amount that remains for practitioners' salaries is often less than \$30K annually. Depending on the size of the practitioners' families (including extended family), wages are either at or slightly above the poverty level⁴². Yet, these very same practitioners work with the casualties of the institutional educational system where teachers and administrators often make over \$50K or \$60K. The woefully underfunded First Nations literacy programs are expected to succeed and they are **succeeding** where the education system has failed.⁴³

First Nations literacy practitioners carry out many functions. They are administrators, teachers, counsellors, advocates, life skills coaches and fundraisers, to name but a few. The practitioner, aside from the learner, is the most important component to First Nation literacy programs. It has been the observation of the author of this chapter over seventeen years in Aboriginal literacy that Aboriginal literacy programs take on the character of the practitioners. If the practitioner is energetic, creative, loves to learn, loves life, then the program – and the learners – will be exposed to that kind of energy and are more likely to adopt those same characteristics.

³⁹ Personal communication, Janet Pond-White, former MTCU Consultant serving the Aboriginal literacy stream, May 2002.

⁴⁰ "Empowering the Spirit, Ensuring Survival, Phase II Field Development, Moving Towards Action. Ontario Native Literacy Coalition. 2003 p. 14-17

⁴¹ Doug Anderson. Native Literacy in Ontario: Areas for Development. Queen's Printer for Ontario. Toronto, 1995

⁴² The 1997 Low Income Cut-offs for the Capital region as defined by Statistics Canada for a family of 4 (four) in 1997 was a gross monthly income of \$2,342 or \$28,112 annually.

⁴³ Position Paper on Aboriginal Literacy. National Aboriginal Design Committee, Toronto, October 2002.

A salary equitable to what non-Aboriginal literacy practitioners receive would be no less than \$35,000 annually. A 2002 survey by the Ontario Literacy Coalition – the Anglophone equivalent to the ONLC – revealed the following average annual salaries for literacy program personnel in community-based, college, board of education, network and umbrella organization programs. Figures for a community-based organization were available only in the teacher/instructor category:

1. teacher/instructor - \$19,749
2. Coordinator (all sectors) - \$30,227, with 50% of respondents reporting earning between \$30,000 - \$35,000 in the year previous to the survey;
3. clerical (all sectors) - \$19,820 with 71% of respondents reporting earnings of under \$25,000;
4. student/tutor coordinator (all sectors) - \$23,125 with 50% reporting earning \$30,000 - \$35,000 in the previous year.

The survey respondents “feel underpaid for their contributions in light of the workload they face”. This report suggests that pay equity may be an issue.⁴⁴ Because of the level of funding they receive, First Nations literacy practitioners perform multiple roles. In addition, Aboriginal literacy coordinators must have administrative, teaching and counselling supports, both in order to offer the best services to the learner and to address the high turnover rate amongst practitioners. These supports will contribute to continuity in programming.

Providing Long-term and Adequate Funding

There are many expenses to running an effective literacy program. Learners have some barriers to participation, such as transportation and daycare. In addition, many literacy programs have become adept at ways of ensuring that learners have access to nutritious meals towards the end of cheque periods. While LBS does provide training support dollars, it is based on a formula closely related to the contact hours. In addition, programs have found it helpful to not only access culture-based and/or culturally-relevant literacy materials but to have their staff participate in ongoing professional development, often in areas other than those which the ONLC is able to provide, due to their inadequate level of funding..

The following is an ideal budget for a First Nations literacy program serving a First Nations community. The salary is adapted from the aforementioned report by the Anglophone stream. The figures for the other categories are based on First Nations practitioner input for what their current funding does not cover.⁴⁵

Salaries	\$ 35,000.00
Administrative/Teaching/Counseling Support (1 FTE)	\$ 30,000.00
Benefits	\$ 6,500.00
Honoraria (Elders, community people)	\$ 2,500.00
Learning Materials	\$ 1,500.00
Office Supplies	\$ 1,500.00
Professional Development	\$ 3,000.00
Learner Expenses (Daycare, transportation, fieldtrips)	\$ 5,000.00
Administration	\$ 15,000.00

⁴⁴ Kim Falcigno, Researcher/Writer. The Level of Pay, Benefits, and Working Conditions of Literacy Employees of the Anglophone Community in Ontario, 2001. Ontario Literacy Coalition, Toronto, 2002.

⁴⁵ Telephone survey of First Nations practitioners by the author of this chapter, June – September 2004.

Total \$100,000.00

Multiply the above budget by the number of programs needed for the First Nations population in Ontario and the result is a more realistic figure than the current situation. Where feasible, literacy programs could be combined with those in nearby communities, whether they are First Nation communities or urban-based Aboriginal organizations that serve First Nations learners.

Recommendations

The following supports/actions would help to solidify the First Nations literacy movement in Ontario and to help First Nations individuals/communities recognize their strengths and realize their potential.

Policy/Funding

1. That First Nations leaders support the NILA in urging the federal government to go beyond its inadequate response to the report, "Raising Adult Literacy Skills: The Need for a Pan-Canadian Response" and that it takes immediate action. The federal Government response to earlier requests was:

"The Government of Canada will continue to explore how best to ensure a strategic approach to Aboriginal literacy issues in its work with partners towards a pan-Canadian strategy on literacy, and the development of a coherent literacy policy in its own activities."

Such an initiative would serve to give the literacy profile that it needs to embed literacy as a necessary foundation to other issues in the First Nations communities and to ensure ongoing, adequate and long-term funding to develop sustainable programming.

2. That First Nations leaders support the ONLC in working with LBS and NLS to establish First Nations control of First Nations literacy. In the interim, the two parties could work together in developing a definition of literacy that is relevant to the realities of First Nations learners, along with criteria for funding, appropriate level of funding, and how to measure the effectiveness of the program. Such an evaluation would be done by exclusively by First Nations

2. That First Nations leaders work in equal partnership with the Ontario government to ensure that Ontario's programs and services fulfill the provisions of Ontario's Aboriginal Policy Framework (APF) or its successor policy. The APF includes guidelines for delivering provincial programs and services. Specifically, it states that,

"Ontario ministries will continue to provide programs and services appropriate to Aboriginal people living on- and off-reserve... Experience has shown that mainstream programs intended for the broader public may not be as cost-effective as ones tailored to the unique and specific needs of Aboriginal peoples."

These programs and services are to be delivered in a business-case manner...will demonstrate the best value for tax dollar over the long-term, based on an assessment of benefits against costs.⁴⁶

Such discussions would include, but not be limited to, broadening the current LBS guidelines so as to include the holistic approach and First Nations language literacy. These discussions would address the stigma attached to illiteracy.

3. That First Nations leaders develop a policy to allocate a portion of all training funding that comes into the community to literacy programming/modules so that clients of said programs and services can access literacy-related and literacy-based assistance. Such allocations could augment the funding of existing programs or start new ones that could be informed by the challenges and successes of existing ones in relevant communities.

Programme Modality

4. That literacy components/modules be added to all levels of education, including formal and informal approaches. Not only must they build on existing literacy programs, they must be informed by the challenges and successes of those programs.

5. That literacy components/modules be added to other training programs in the community, either through accessing the services of an existing literacy program or by hiring a literacy support person specifically for that training program.

6. That literacy issues be integrated into other programs and services in the community such as, child and family services, healing and wellness and youth.

Capacity-Building/Research

7. That all levels of governments ensure that their staff, especially decision-makers on financial allocations, have awareness training on the scope and impacts of literacy so that decisions can be made accordingly.

8. That awareness-training sessions be delivered to all staff involved in the delivery of education/literacy to First Nations learners. Awareness training would address factors that may impede a person's ability to learn, including but not limited to, a mismatch of teaching and learning styles, the socio-economic realities in First Nations communities that affect learning and the factors that need to be addressed in the transition from an oral culture to a literate culture.

9. That research be carried out on the most effective means of addressing literacy issues, e.g., a literature review of relevant programs including those in other jurisdictions. In addition, an environmental scan of "best practices" so as to extrapolate principles and practices that may be transferable to First Nations communities.

⁴⁶ Aboriginal Policy Framework. <http://www.nativeaffairs.jus.gov.on.ca/english/apf.htm> April 24, 2004.

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