

Abbotsford District Literacy Plan 2010

(An update of the 2009 Plan)

Literacy Matters Association Abbotsford



June 1, 2010

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Reflections on 2009 - 2010

Literacy is about more than reading and writing – it is about how we communicate in society. It is about social practices and relationships, about knowledge, language and culture. Literacy ... finds its place in our lives alongside other ways of communicating. Indeed, literacy itself takes many forms: on paper, on the computer screen, on TV, on posters and signs. Those who use literacy take it for granted – but those who cannot use it are excluded from much communication in today's world. Indeed, it is the excluded who can best appreciate the notion of "*literacy as freedom*". (UNESCO, Statement for the United Nations Literacy Decade, 2003–2012; italics added)

1. Priorities/objectives and actions from the 2009 District Literacy Plan

The work plan had two primary focus areas identified this year. The first area was Aboriginal development and the second area was focused on adult literacy.

a) Aboriginal Literacy

The strategy for this focus was to support the delivery of sustainable, culturally relevant literacy programs for Aboriginal learners.

Intended Outcomes:

- Increase engagement for aboriginal learners and families in literacy programs and services.
- Increase collaboration among community service providers of the needs of Aboriginal learners.

This year, the Principal of the Aboriginal Education Centre and the Abbotsford Early Childhood Committee Coordinator, joined the Board of Literacy Matters Association. Aboriginal literacy efforts both within and outside the school district, was spearheaded by these individuals with the support of Literacy Matters Association.

The Abbotsford Early Childhood Committee played a key role by forming a working group focused on Aboriginal early learning that has gradually expanded and grown to include other community members interested in Aboriginal literacy. This also led to the need for the Abbotsford Early Childhood Committee to re-do the parent perspective survey (with a focus on plain language and Aboriginal parent engagement).

The Literacy Matters Association was instrumental in providing the funding for survey analysis, supporting the plain language development and helping to get the survey out to community partners. We have also participated in ongoing working group meetings to create a focus on Aboriginal learners. AECC spearheaded the working group, distribution and analysis of the survey and the Aboriginal Education Centre helped get the survey out to all of the parents through the School District.

There are several outcomes to these efforts that are listed here in no particular order:

- The Aboriginal Education Centre family gatherings have begun to include the Fraser Valley Regional Libraries in their events - Literacy Matters Association facilitated this connection between

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the Fraser Valley Regional Libraries and the Aboriginal Education Centre. In April, the library offered a story time (using Aboriginal stories focused on salmon since this was the first salmon festival) at the family gathering night! In June, they have been invited again to attend the family gathering on National Aboriginal Day and we hope to get several families attending and obtaining library cards as well.

- We applied for and received funding through Abbotsford Community Foundation for Reading Buddies (a reading mentorship program focused on Grades 1-4 students who are mentored by secondary school students or adults). The program begins in the fall of 2010, but we have been doing preparatory work with the support of the Fraser Valley Regional Libraries and Candie Thorne (the coordinator from the Mission program). This program will cater to Aboriginal and ESL learners and will be advertised at the family gathering in June.
- We participate in the Fraser Region Aboriginal Early Childhood Committee and support their training and the idea of housing their cultural literacy kits (Moe the Mouse and the Cedar Kits) at the Aboriginal Education Centre.

The kit includes:

- Drums
- Rattles
- Shakers (all with protocol)
- Videos (jingle dress video, dancing, regalia, drumming)
- Books (for children or resources)
- Music (Halq'emeylem CD's, pow-wow, own community music)
- Resource List (people, elders)
- Regalia: Shawl and sashes, Jingle dress, Button blanket, Ribbon shirt and sashes, Cedar dresses,
- headbands and moccasins
- Activities in binder (cultural curriculum)

We are still working on distribution of the kits. We were also made aware of the fact that this group has worked with Fraser Valley Regional Libraries to supply Aboriginal early literacy books. We have also begun work on developing a toolkit to increase understanding and use of traditional foods and traditional plants for early childhood providers.

- We have attracted new members to the Aboriginal working group from the Metis Association, Xyolhemeylh, and Fraser Valley Child Development Centre, and have begun to look at other funding options.

b) Adult Literacy

Adult literacy has been a strong focus for the Literacy Matters Association this year. The strategy for this focus was to facilitate the provision of seamless, integrated literacy programs and services for adult learners throughout our community literacy and support systems.

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Intended Outcomes:

- The strategic plan for adult literacy is completed and implemented.
- The strategic plan is implemented and regular progress meetings occur to address the identified plans.

In the spring, we began an adult literacy consultation process that addressed:

- the community impact of low levels of literacy among adults in Abbotsford;
- major concerns related to literacy, as expressed by well-informed community interests;
- suggested community initiatives in response to these concerns;
- possible sources of support for these initiatives; and
- suggested next steps.

Three community consultation meetings were held in October 2009, December 2009 and January 2010. In total, over 30 community members representing over 20 service interests participated. Through this process the group developed its collective understanding of the human interests affected, and of Abbotsford's particular needs for literacy support.

They identified the following issues listed in no particular order:

- *Immigrants often arrive without adequate English to pursue skilled work.*
- *Adults at-risk face complex and multiple barriers.*
Many Abbotsford residents struggle with a great variety of personal challenges, which usually appear in some combination. These risk factors include the effects of childhood violence; family chaos and weak personal attachments; devastating experiences of failure and shaming in school; severe unresolved trauma or grief; social skills deficits; developmental delays; mental illness; insecure housing; criminal experiences, incarceration and criminal records; and drug addiction. Weak literacy skills are commonly involved both as a cause and a result.
- *Adult literacy interventions are not optimally co-ordinated or integrated.*
There is a great interest in sharing information and co-ordinating a wide range of services and interventions (both specifically related to literacy and to other issues of poverty and risk). Service providers want to work with knowledge of the other community offerings available, as well as how best to access and use them.
- *Adults looking for help do not know where to go for it.*
People that need literacy support (and possibly other social services) do not commonly find it easy to get the help they need. Even experienced service providers find it difficult to help clients overcome barriers such as obscure eligibility requirements, "Catch-22" policies, improperly informed referrals, inconvenient service hours and gaps in service provision. (Lack of affordable child care and convenient public transit contribute to the difficulty.)

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These recommendations were reviewed by the Literacy Matters Association and the following priorities are within the scope and capacity of Literacy Matters and will form the first steps in implementing the adult literacy plan:

Priority 1:

A regular schedule of networking meetings will be established. We will develop a directory of adult literacy services and assets for adult learners. The Principal of Abbotsford Virtual School, agreed to head this sub-committee.

Priority 2:

To work at developing seamless adult literacy tutoring supports for Abbotsford. This priority recognizes that many efforts are fragmented and this will move to coordinate adult literacy tutoring and enhance recruitment, training and outreach efforts for adult literacy tutors. The Chairperson of Literacy Matters Association, along with a small group, will investigate how we can mobilize and coordinate our services through Community Access to Literacy and Learning (CALL) Abbotsford.

Priority 3:

A working group from the Fraser Valley Housing Network has indicated interest in addressing low literacy in adult offenders and will convene a series of meetings over the coming months.

The other focus areas that require ongoing maintenance and attention, are the early childhood and the child and youth efforts intended to address literacy. Both groups made substantial progress this year and have strong representation and commitment.

c) Other Highlights

A few highlights of the work completed by the child and youth committee include the following:

- Media literacy training session was offered to 30 professionals on youth engagement.
- Literacy Matters Association funded the purchase of Raz Readers (an interactive computerized reading program for Clearbrook and Godson Schools and Abbotsford Community Services for ESL learners).
- A youth engagement process called "Meaningful Media Nights" will begin the fall of 2010 and the first youth speaker has been invited who will discuss a book he wrote and open up a dialogue about youth and gangs.
- The group is soliciting and collecting used but operational laptops for ESL programs.
- Participation in the Literacy Fair at Fraser Valley Regional Library
- Signing of the Child and Youth Friendly Charter with the City of Abbotsford
- Support for the development of the youth health clinic
- Participation and involvement in SCOPE (healthy eating and diabetes preventions program)

Highlights of the work completed by and with Abbotsford Early Childhood Committee include:

- Expansion of parachute games program for early literacy
- Financial literacy training

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- A funded program for Literacy Matters Association serving parents and children of South Asian families focused on healthy eating and active living. The program offers healthy eating and active living tips and is roughly based on the HOP program. This program is offered for two hours weekly at Clearbrook Elementary School. This program has been a great success!
- Parent perspective survey
- Plain language development

Success Factors

Attribution and contributions to our success is difficult to measure, however these are several indicators of how we do our work:

- A solid foundation of literacy in the early childhood committee
- A solid foundation and growing interest in child and youth literacy
- Over 35 community partners who have collaborated with Literacy Matters
- A plan to address food security (growing food to waste management) in the community
- A growing interest in financial literacy as a poverty reduction tool
- A growing interest in health literacy and a growing network of people working on health literacy including Patient Voices Network and Legacies 2010. Health literacy is a complex phenomenon that involves skills, knowledge, and the expectations that health professionals have of the public's interest in and understanding of health information and services. Health information and services are often unfamiliar, complicated and technical, even for people with higher levels of education. People of all ages, races, incomes and education levels—not just people with limited reading skills or people for whom English is a second language—are affected by limited health literacy. (National Action to Promote Health Literacy, 2009)
- Involvement in a minimum of 8 collaborative community groups
- Expanding and challenging perceptions of literacy

The Literacy Matters Association was actively involved in the development of a “child and youth friendly plan” for the City of Abbotsford.

Literacy is a key part of this plan, and this is a key indicator of greater community understanding of the importance of literacy to community development.

Another indicator of attitudes and perceptions occurred in the development of a community plan for food security in Abbotsford. Many service providers queried how literacy could be included in addressing food security across the City of Abbotsford and Literacy Matters Association provided several examples and ways we could collectively work to address food security, health, cultural and general literacy across the community. The fact that these recommendations were accepted and adopted was a loud statement that literacy is a “joined up” issue that links to practically all community issues in one way or another.

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2. What has changed in the past year that affects literacy in the community?

This year the time allocated to the LOC has been stretched to include more aspects of the community literacy plan. Therefore, additional resources or collective grant writing may be beneficial to regional literacy work.

Abbotsford School District has amended its Achievement Contract process, so the LOC had less involvement with this planning process. However, since the School District is well represented on Literacy Matters Association, we continue to have access to updates on the work of the district in improving literacy.

3. Collaboration and the Community Development Process

Abbotsford is a complex adaptive system whose components (the individuals, organizations, institutions, and all the diverse social-technical-political-ecological systems that are present within the community) continuously interact with one another to exchange information and resources; collaborate; compete; self-organize; and adapt under the influence of diverse economic, social and environmental pressures that impacts the internal and external aspects of the community.

Our community development approach embraces the complexity of the community. Understanding the issues faced in Abbotsford is gained through considering the complex inter-relationships that exist between the community and its environment. Asset mapping is a useful tool to visualize the diverse interactions within the community and between the community and its environment. Asset maps can also be used to assess the level of diversity within the community—diversity that is critical for the system to thrive—and to determine what entities/interventions need to be added to rebalance the system.

Our insights on how to improve the adaptive capacity of Abbotsford by designing community structures that facilitate the flow of information and the development of communication networks; connecting diverse assets and resources to one another; supporting the development of collaboration; decentralizing power and decision-making; and increasing resilience in times of economic stress, hardship or downturn has been essential.

Our community development efforts focus on designing structures that facilitate the collective coordination of action and the development of mutually beneficial relationships.

The role of the literacy outreach coordinator is to mobilize and empower the community to do “adaptive work.” This means engaging the community members in dialogue that supports the development of shared-understanding of the issues to be addressed; the development of relationship based on trust; and the co-creation of shared meaning and purposes from which a new vision can emerge and new strategies can be designed.

As a living system, Abbotsford cannot be directed but only influenced. There are no single prescriptions for success. The strategies we employ must be context-specific and their

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implementation carefully monitored using feedback loops and other evaluation systems so that to continuously adjust and improve the system.

Thinking About the 2010-11 Year

4. Challenges and Opportunities

Challenges

The importance of the regional literacy coordinator cannot be overstated and continued advocacy efforts on this front are desired and appreciated. One important legacy that the Regional Literacy Coordinator has left, is the importance of connecting Fraser Valley literacy outreach coordinators across the region. This benefits our individual and collective learning, increases efficiencies, creates potential economies of scale and provides a degree of consistency with literacy efforts across Fraser Valley communities.

We have appreciated the recent efforts made by 2010 Legacies Now on health literacy and see this as a huge need for the community of Abbotsford so continued development in that area is an asset. Fraser Health has also restructured its health promotion focus and created healthier communities specialists. There is now a single person within the health authority responsible for the City of Abbotsford and the focus of the restructuring is still unfolding. This change has had an impact on food security and other community development work.

Another recent change by the Abbotsford Early Childhood Committee the elimination of the role of the South Asian community developer in the community. Given the demographics of the community and the importance of the outreach to immigrant families, this was also a very significant change and loss to the community. Many new immigrant parents and grandparents report considerable social isolation and inability to develop language and community connections.

It is still too early to comment on the implications of this decision, however the impact on new immigrant families may be felt throughout the community.

Opportunities

Professionals in Abbotsford need to explicitly teach and model how to work collaboratively. The professional literature on cooperative learning provides practical guidance for teachers but not so for community professionals. When the community functions as a learning community, people learn how to be effective citizens. They learn to value and draw on the cultural and linguistic resources and prior knowledge that each citizen brings to the community.

Work in this type of collaborative environment has the ability to:

- connect people to the backgrounds, cultures and personal identities of each citizen;
- develop multicultural values;
- provide a wide range of positive male and female role models;

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- provide opportunities for citizens to be engaged in their community and develop social responsibility and leadership skills.
- offer strong school-family-community partnerships that can profoundly influence the literacy learning of all citizens.

We need to continue to improve our ability to work collaboratively.

5. Adjustments to the Literacy Plan

This year there were two major adjustments to the literacy plan. Workplace literacy is currently in a holding pattern and there are a number of reasons that this is the case:

- economic downturn
- lack of linkages between employers
- fear of poaching employees within the business community
- lack of a learning community within some local employers

Changes to the District Achievement Contract process will continue to make it challenging for the LOC to be involved at the K-12 level, so Literacy Matters Association will continue to explore ways to be apprised of the district's literacy plans.

New Initiatives on the Horizon

We hope to launch a fundraising plan in the fall that will help to support and maintain the Reading Buddies, Raz Readers, youth media night's programs. The other activities will focus on development of the adult and Aboriginal literacy plan implementation and continuation of the other subcommittees and collaborative work in the community.

What initiatives have been expanded or continued?

The CALL program has continued and expanded over the last year. CALL is an adult literacy tutor matching service. Abbotsford Continuing Education (ACE) moved to a new facility and became Bakerview Centre for Learning and offered enhanced services. Full-day kindergarten was formally announced and will begin in a number of schools across the District in the fall.

Neighbourhood of Learning is planned for Abbotsford Collegiate in 2012 and plans are currently underway to negotiate the co-location of numerous services.

6. Requirements to meet the goals and employ actions for the coming year

Community-based change initiatives often have ambitious goals and so planning specific on-the-ground strategies to those goals is difficult. Likewise, the task of planning and carrying out evaluation research that can inform practice and surface broader lessons for the field in general is a challenge.

Literacy Matters Association will need to find creative ways to resource its plan and initiatives. This will assist in expanding the literacy conversation in the community.

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7. Assessment Process

It is important to note that this is a living document and will, in all probability, change. Our project is managed through integrated processes for decision making that promote collaboration and community based ownership of the project.

Meeting our stated objectives will continue to be the primary evaluation method, however, Literacy Matters Association will continue to refine this going forward.

We also intend to link our evaluative information to the Legacies 2010 reporting process, providing information regarding our impact on literacy in the community.