

“Addendum”

Feedback From the 1999-2000 Pilot Phase of “Eager to Learn”



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CLASS EVALUATION

MY PERSONAL DEFINITION OF FAMILY LITERACY IS:

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The Community Services Council (CSC) of Newfoundland and Labrador conducted an evaluation of the *Eager to Learn* resource manual in 1999-2000. Comments were obtained from:

- Adult Basic Education (ABE) Instructors at the College of the North Atlantic (CONA) in St. John's and Clarenville, Newfoundland;
- Staff from the Brighter Futures Coalition in St. John's, Newfoundland;
- Staff from Health and Community Services, St. John's Region;
- Representatives of the Association of Early Childhood Educators (AECENL) of Newfoundland and Labrador.

The evaluation focused on delivering Eager to Learn as an ABE credit in Newfoundland settings.

2.0 OTHER COURSE APPLICATIONS FOR THIS COURSE

The course could be used in a variety of settings in addition to Adult Basic Education but was not field tested in either of those locations by CSC:

- The course could be beneficial to schools as a parent resource package or as a preschool orientation package. More work needs to be done in this area to develop this.
- The course could easily be delivered at Community Centres or Family Resource Centres.
- The course can be delivered to early childhood educators for continuing education requirements.

3.0 FEEDBACK

3.1 Overall Commentary on *Eager to Learn*

- The *Eager to Learn* course binder is well written. It is easy to comprehend and understand. The modules are well laid out with objectives and outcomes.

- The course binder is adaptable to a variety of environments. It is usable by facilitators with varying degrees of knowledge in family literacy. One of the instructors, a Physics instructor, had not taught any family literacy course before and reported he taught it with very little difficulty. However, teachers who are inexperienced with direct literacy teaching may wish the resource binder be enhanced with some additional background information on family literacy. One potential source of such information is the NALD database (www.nald.ca).
- The objectives flow smoothly from one to the other, even to the point facilitators did not realize when moving across objectives. The sections tie together well. There was much information to be used for discussion and analysis.
- The suggested resources are adequate to teach the course but need to be supplemented by new information, especially if students request more information on particular topics. This is readily available from a variety of sources.
- The course is flexible enough to acknowledge and support literacy activities already ongoing in homes. It is also flexible enough to support the diverse families that are served. Literacy is not only an issue for low income families but for all families.
- The course is primarily intended to deal with family literacy issues of children aged 0 to 5 but many parents used some of the ideas for their older children. Parents of older children were reflective in the groups and assisted the parents of younger children. This flexibility especially showed itself during the class discussions when much of the support occurred.
- Some adults in the course reported that they enjoyed the course in spite of not having any children and that Eager to Learn prepared them for future parenthood.
- Non-parenting adults reported that it was a little more difficult to do the activities that required the participation of children. During class discussions the parents had more concrete comments to offer the group than non-parents.

3.2 Specific Comments on Modules in *Eager to Learn* (1-8)

The following are direct quotes taken from evaluation questionnaires and survey forms filled out during the pilot phase of *Eager to Learn*. The Community Services Council, Newfoundland & Labrador would like to thank everyone who responded.

Direct Quotes

- “When delivering the course, try to keep the group size down to a maximum of twenty people.”
- “The course does not have to be delivered as a whole course but can be delivered in sections or as part of another course. Be careful if calling it a course because people may not then be willing to use parts of it.”
- “People would be willing to participate in this type of course if they feel it benefits their family. Most would be here for my family”.
- “Be aware that some people may have negative connotations about the words family literacy.” “Are you telling me I can’t read or am not a fit person?,” may be a comment by some parents.
- “The course is in a straightforward format that can be easily used by people.”
- “The group work in conjunction with the individual work is good because it allows for individuals some flexibility to work with their families and the group work allows for ideas and information sharing.”
- “One binder cannot cover all things but this one has a variety of ideas and items that can be used and adapted.”
- “Be a nice idea to build a binder as the adults go through the course so they can see success and feel they are getting somewhere.”
- “Reading is enjoyable and not a ‘chore.’ It is a close time to be shared between family and friends.”
- “Emphasize the ‘fun’ aspect of the course.”
- “The order of the modules is appropriate and flows smoothly.”
- “It is good that the emphasis is on child development.”

- “When offering the course there should be a nominal fee as people are more apt to value something that is purchased.”

The following are direct quotes on the eight learning modules in the resource binder.

Module 1 - What is Family Literacy?

- This module sets the tone for the rest of the course.
- Emphasize the fun aspect of family literacy.
- The course deals with helping young children *learn to read* instead of *teaching them* to read.
- This course can be a means to getting adults involved in their own literacy training.
- The brainstorming ideas worked well and prompted much discussion.

Module 2 - Parents as People

- Instructors in this pilot phase felt this was a make or break session for the whole course.
- Do not make people feel responsible for problems with their children.
- Include a section on good things about children.
- The first two modules contain a lot of theory and not as much practical exercises to do with the children. When completing these first two modules add a practical activity and /or give something tangible that can be taken away from the course.
- Be certain nobody feels deficient by providing, at this point, an overview of the course and focusing on the placement of this module relative to the remainder of the course.
- Inform all students that the self esteem guide is not a test. Make certain people feel a sense of accomplishment when doing this exercise.

- It is important to increase parents' self esteem and provide them with an understanding of how to build the self esteem of children.

Module 3 - Learning About Children

- It is important for course facilitators, leaders or instructors to have an understanding of child development and what is appropriate at the different ages. This includes activities, reading, talking, and behavioral expectations. As well, be aware of differences in learning styles.
- Be careful of the word Practicum - use 'Application' or 'Activity'.
- Use a generic approach to dealing with issues in this module; avoid personal anecdotes.
- Make sure you link the stages of child development to literacy acquisition.
- Be certain everyone understands that the ages and stages are not 'cast in stone' and that children progress at different rates. Likewise, people have characteristics of each of the different learning styles.
- There is a lack of information pertaining to multiple births in this module. Facilitators may wish to supplement.

Module 4 - Preparing Your Home for Literacy

- Modeling is very important in order for parents to transmit literacy skills to their children. Children must see their parents reading, writing, etc and valuing literacy. Literacy can also be taught in the broad sense and not just with reading and writing. Look everywhere around you for literacy materials. You can be a good parent-teacher doing a multitude of other activities. You can teach children many skills and concepts without spending lots of money.
- The diagram outlining where you can find literacy materials could be a good starter for this section.

- Include information around art and numeracy, and maybe do a similar diagram for places to find numeracy materials, and perhaps generate the chart during a class.
- Emphasize that books are important but not everything.
- A trip to the library, new or used book store would be a beneficial exercise for this module.

Module 5 - Having Fun with Literacy

- Include numeracy with the literacy.
- The course facilitator could do a web on numeracy, similar to the literacy web in Module 4, on how children currently use their numeracy skills.

Module 6 - Reading & Talking

- Emphasize the importance of oral language development in the literacy of children. Help eliminate attitudes such as “What can I talk to him about? He’s only two.” And “Why would I read to a baby?”
- Be sure to maximize the strategies and make effective use of all the different techniques.

Module 7 - Challenges of Learning

- The title is “challenges of learning,” but deals primarily with learning disabilities. Many challenges have been omitted. These include physical, speech language deficits, sensory motor deficits, social skills, environmental deprivation, emotional difficulties, etc. ○ Be very clear about the differences between learning disabilities and developmental milestones or achievements.
- This section was found to be informative and easy to read, especially for someone who does not have a lot of training in that area. It is good for a quick reference.
- The course is gentle and positive and honest pertaining to learning disabilities.

Module 8 - Taking Literacy to School & Beyond

- Be aware of cultural differences that may exist in a population.
- Emphasize that the overall objectives of this module deal with issues occurring from birth - not only the year preceding school.
- Build a confidence in parents so they will actively participate in school - go to curriculum night, parent-teacher interviews - without feeling they are in a threatening environment. Establish effective channels of communication between home and school.
- There should be sensitivity and awareness among educators that the school system has disappointed many people who might be taking a course on family literacy.

3.3 Time Frame for Delivering this Course

The time frame for the course will be 20-40 hours of direct instruction with additional time required for learners to work at home to an approximate total of 60 hours.

- This will vary depending on the needs of the group and the composition of the group members.
- Note that 60 hours of instruction is the minimum for an Adult Basic Education credit.

Group members will likely want to discuss issues in each module. Allow for discussion time, especially following the introduction of new topics.

3.4 Course Goals and Objectives

Instructors in the pilot phase felt the course met and even exceeded its goals and objectives.

- The module objectives flowed smoothly from one to the other and within the units.
- The units are self-contained which provides the course some flexibility but also lends itself to supplementary resources from additional family literacy programs.

Facilitators reported no omissions in the course objectives.

3.5 Delivery Methods

Group discussion was the most common delivery method. Because of the wide range of topics in the course, different methods were used at different times including brainstorming sessions, guest speakers, lectures, videos, written tasks, and self-exploration.

Group discussion allowed for experiences to be drawn upon from outside the course or within the students' own environments. Self-paced delivery methods would be less well adapted to the course as much of the strength lies in the peer and group interactions.

3.6 Evaluation Techniques for Marking and Grading

This course may be offered on a graded, or non-graded basis.

- It will be necessary to provide Adult Basic Education (ABE) students with a score out of 100 percent if they are using *Eager to Learn* for a General Options credit. Refer to the Overview Section (page 5) in the front of the resource binder for *suggested* values in each teaching module.
- It is also acceptable to assign a Pass or Fail value to the full course, depending on the teaching circumstances and the requirements of students.

Instructors who took part in the Pilot Phase of *Eager to Learn* found it possible to assign grades and scores to participation in journal writing; class discussions; role plays and any of the assignments called for in the resource binder.

- Use your imagination and feel free to ask students their preference for evaluation.

Some students prefer the assurance of a grade, whereas others may be more comfortable with a simple *Pass* or *Fail* designation. The resource binder does not contain criteria for marking a difference between Pass and Fail. An instructor wishing to use such a system would be best advised to develop clear criteria for passing or failing a student and to share these, in advance, with students enrolled in *Eager to Learn*.

Regardless of marking procedures, instructors would be well advised to keep an attendance record of class time, per student. Professional organizations with requirements for on-going education, for example, usually ask for a record of hours spent in instruction. They may also

ask for your recommended guidelines on how much self-directed study time was associated with the course.

3.7 Resources

The suggested resources and the course binder are fairly extensive and adequate but need to be supplemented in some areas. Depending on the topic and the level of interest there may be a need to add some materials, especially if students are interested in learning ‘challenges’ an area where new learning resources are being developed continuously.

3.8 Suggestions for Course Improvement

Instructors were pleased with the course and offered few suggestions for change. They did suggest materials should be updated periodically to keep things current and to add to the resource list, especially if *Eager to Learn* was used by ABE students as a General Options credit.

3.9 Students’ Initial Expectations of the Course

Students at all three pilot sites enrolled in the course for a variety of reasons. Some wanted to enhance their parenting skills, and get some idea what family literacy is all about. Others wanted to formulate new ideas of family literacy, learn/hear ideas on how to become more involved in the learning of their children or grandchildren, and gain new parenting skills. One group of learners had recently taken a course ‘Parents as Teaching Partners’ and wanted to build on this newly acquired knowledge. Still others were uncertain what to expect but were willing to try a new course!

3.10 Students’ Evaluation of the Course

Most students were pleased with the course and felt it was beneficial and worthwhile. They enjoyed sharing ideas and learning from each other. They spent time reflecting on their own family situations and realized others had to cope with similar situations. They were reassured that they were already doing some positive things toward improving family literacy. Some of the students would have liked more material and a longer course. Overall it seems to have met their expectations.

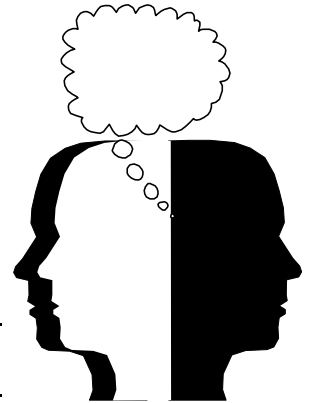
4.0 SUMMARY

The 1999-2000 evaluation showed that a course on family literacy is worthwhile as both a personal and educational experience. The course was interesting to students and instructors alike. It was flexible and fun.

THANKS EVERYONE!

My Personal Definition of Family Literacy:

Lined area for writing a personal definition of family literacy.



Class Evaluation

What did we learn together?



Family literacy, for me, is:

The best part, for me, was:

The worst part, for me, was:

Anything else?
