

Building Language and Literacy Skills



*“We must be aware, however,
that capacity-building programs not become elitist,
not focus exclusively on strengthening the skills
and knowledge-base of the already-empowered, the
already-articulate among the Arctic’s young people.
For as important as it is to nurture tomorrow’s
community and business leaders in the North, this
still represents only a small portion of the children
and youth who need our help.”*

*“Preventable solutions to illiteracy in the North
cannot be piecemeal or isolated, however, but are
best conducted within the context of the whole family
and, indeed, the whole community.”*

*Arctic Ambassador, Mary Simon in
Children and Youth of the Arctic: A Critical Challenge of Sustainable Development,
The Northern Review #18: 70-78*

The Benefits:

Why Use Oral History Projects to Develop Language and Literacy Skills?

Studying Oral Histories...

Builds a sense of personal and cultural identity

- ☑ People develop pride and a sense of identity when they study the day-to-day life skills and traditional stories of their culture.
- ☑ When learners, younger children, parents and grandparents come together to share a common goal, there is an exchange of ideas, skills, knowledge, beliefs and values that reflects traditional society and yet serves modern needs.

Brings Elders back to the teaching role they held traditionally

- ☑ Parents and grandparents once had children with them for the whole day in all seasons and could gradually pass along skills, knowledge and values. Elders' involvement in oral history and literacy projects could help restore them to their traditional role as teachers.
- ☑ Elders' wisdom becomes more accessible to the whole community when their knowledge is recorded.

Helps people understand their own culture and heritage

- ☑ Studying oral history helps people understand themselves and their place in the world.

Records important cultural and historical knowledge

- ☑ It is critical to record Elders' knowledge before they pass away.

Empowers

- ☑ People get a sense that they are part of history.
- ☑ In books and history classes people are lead to believe that history is all about important people – queens and prime ministers. Oral history gives people a sense that they are important.

Strengthens communities

- ☑ Studying oral history creates opportunities for respectful communication.
- ☑ Studying oral history creates a common understanding of the social forces that have shaped the community.
- ☑ Studying oral history allows students to feel that they belong and that their input is important.

Strengthens Inuktitut and Inuinnaqtun language skills

- ☒ Young people listen to the Inuktitut and Inuinnaqtun of the Elders and increase their vocabulary and understanding of traditional language forms.
- ☒ Today English is everywhere in the environment; when people study oral history, knowledge of Inuktitut or Inuinnaqtun is important and necessary.
- ☒ Oral histories provide an interesting and absorbing topic for Inuktitut reading and writing projects.

Oral history is based on people's own experiences

- ☒ People learn best when they start from their own experiences and interests.
- ☒ Learners see the connection between books and school and their real world when they study their own history.

Leaves a lasting record of the past in your community

- ☒ Interviews and learners' projects can be kept in a library or other public places where the whole community can enjoy and learn from them.

Allows young people to experience being part of the past as well as the present

- ☒ Through traditional naming practices, Inuit are part of both the past and the present at the same time. When learners study kinship and naming and learn more about the lives of their namesakes and relatives, they see themselves as a part of history.

Raises the status of literacy and upgrading programs in the community

- ☒ Learners who work on oral history projects are performing a valued community service – making important historic information available to the public. It shows the community that learners can do meaningful work.
- ☒ Oral history projects highlight information that everyone values and shares.

Oral histories can become resources for literacy and language development

- ☒ Other learners can use the resources created by the literacy group working on an oral history project – resources which are interesting and relevant to them.

Promotes communication between the generations

- ✓ Sharing time and communicating with Elders helps learners understand the Elders' points of view, beliefs and values.
- ✓ This helps young people develop a sense of identity.

Motivates learners to do their best work

- ✓ Learners who are not self-confident will develop a real sense of pride from this important work.
- ✓ If learners know the final product is for the community and that their friends and family will find it interesting and enjoyable, they will do their best work.

Oral history is accessible to many people – not just historians who study history at universities

- ✓ Oral history gives people a sense that they make history and are a part of it.
- ✓ History is more interesting when we see ourselves as part of it.

Learners build new skills and confidence through studying oral histories

- ✓ Critical thinking skills
- ✓ Improved literacy skills – reading and writing (in any language)
- ✓ Listening skills – increased vocabulary and understanding of the complexities of the language
- ✓ Speaking, public speaking skills or performance skills
- ✓ Personal development and growth
- ✓ Interpersonal skills – cooperation and teamwork
- ✓ Organizing skills – planning and coordinating
- ✓ Research skills
- ✓ Interviewing skills
- ✓ Technical expertise – using computers, recorders, cameras
- ✓ Basic numeracy or math skills

Why Intergenerational Literacy?

One way to approach a literacy and oral history program is to make it an intergenerational project. Literacy group members can work side by side with their children for parts of the project. As well, their parents, aunts and uncles or other relatives may be valuable resources to an oral history project.

What is Intergenerational or Family Literacy?

Intergenerational Literacy, sometimes called 'Family Literacy', is the ways families use language skills, literacy skills and cultural information to do day-to-day tasks, to keep important traditional and cultural knowledge alive.

At the Pauktuutit Annual General Meeting in October 2000 delegates discussed literacy issues. They saw some challenges to Inuktitut language and culture.

Inuktitut and Inuit culture are being eroded for many reasons:

- More people have TV in their homes.
- More parents speak to their children in English and children speak more English.
- Inuit who can speak English tend to use it a lot.
- Fewer people go to church, which used to be a place outside of school where people read and could learn to read in Inuktitut.
- Problems at home make it difficult for children to learn.

Pauktuutit delegates felt it was important to support the idea of approaching literacy development through children and families.

Traditional family patterns support an intergenerational approach:

- ☒ The bond between parents and children is a natural one.
- ☒ It is traditional for children to treat their Elders with respect.
- ☒ It is traditional for Inuit to treat their children with respect.
- ☒ Elders want to work with children to strengthen Inuit language and culture.

Intergenerational approaches can enhance community development and wellness. Supporting literacy, language and culture through children and families is one way to raise the quality of people's lives by:

- ☑ strengthening family and community bonds;
- ☑ improving family communication and the ability to network with others;
- ☑ increasing people's ability to keep jobs and prevent problems related to unemployment;
- ☑ supporting community survival and create a progressive, healthy community;
- ☑ creating educational resources by documenting the talents and traditional knowledge of Inuit;
- ☑ improving individual self-esteem which can make families healthier;
- ☑ providing interactive alternatives to TV that strengthen relationships between Elders and children; and
- ☑ involving more parents in their children's learning and schooling.



The Principles

Oral Language is the Basis for Reading and Writing

We become literate by building on and connecting to our oral language. Strong oral language skills are necessary for the development of strong reading and writing skills. A strong first language is the basis for developing critical thinking skills.

Language Experiences are Dependent on a Context

The ways people speak, read and write vary depending on the task, the situation and the purpose. Literacy instruction needs a meaningful context; you can't learn to read and write without a purpose for your reading and writing. The study of oral history provides a meaningful context.

Oral and Written Language are Interconnected

The four modes – listening, speaking, reading and writing support each other. Literacy programs should develop the four modes equally.

Language Learning is Real-life Learning

Oral and written language experiences must be purposeful, functional and real. Oral history projects can provide real opportunities to use language, such as speaking to an Elder to arrange an interview or writing a letter to ask for donations.

Language and Culture are Connected

Oral history projects combine the strengthening of Inuktitut or Inuinnaqtun language skills with cultural stories, customs, skills, beliefs and values.

Language Learning is a Process

In an oral history or literacy project the process of learning is as important as the final product. Learners have opportunities to evaluate their own learning as it progresses. Learners should feel safe taking risks and learning from each attempt.

Language Learning is Holistic and Unique

All language reflects cognitive (thinking), emotional, social and personal differences. The oral and written language that people use shows their individuality and yet is dependent on their social, cultural and political situation.

Principles of Adult Learning

To learn a new skill, adults need to:

- ✓ understand why they need to learn it;
- ✓ see how it is used;
- ✓ fit it into existing knowledge;
- ✓ practise it;
- ✓ review it; and
- ✓ use it in 'real' situations.

- An adult learning environment must feel safe and non-threatening to the learners.
- Adults need to make decisions about their learning – participatory approaches include learners in program design and operation.
- Adults have a lot of background knowledge and experience that contributes to their learning.
- Learning is enhanced when educators and learners talk about strategies for learning new things and for overcoming difficulties.
- Adults need opportunities to develop critical thinking skills.
- Many adults learn experientially (learning through doing). They need to be active participants in the process of learning.
- Adults increase their literacy skills when they learn in a meaningful context.
- Good programs build on learners' cultural background and language – which strengthens self-esteem and a sense of personal identity.
- Adult programs that are community-based and community controlled are most successful.
- Adults succeed in programs that are flexible – programs that draw on the strengths of each learner and accommodate learners' needs.
- Learning to read and write takes time and a lot of practice. Learners and educators need to set realistic goals.
- All adults are gifted in some area. Everyone has talents to share.
- Learning happens by moving from the known to the unknown, from the concrete to the abstract.
- Adults' learning is enhanced through group interaction, discussion and sharing.

- Adult learners need opportunities for taking risks and making mistakes.
- Adults' lives are busy and complex. Programs that include intergenerational learning or family literacy allow learners to integrate school with their day-to-day lives.
- Enthusiasm about learning can be contagious.
- Adult learners have many different ways of learning. It is important to stimulate as many senses as possible and to give learners as many options as possible. Many learners prefer to watch – then do.
- Learners need encouragement and positive feedback.
- Adults need opportunities for independent work to lessen the sense of dependency that some learners may feel.
- Adults develop self-awareness and analysis skills through assessing their own work. Formal testing may be useful or necessary at times, but it doesn't help learners learn to reflect on their own progress.
- Increased age or poor health can affect the reaction time, vision and hearing of adult learners. However, they do not lose their ability to learn.
- Learning is a lifelong process. Program facilitators and educators are also learners.

*“The important thing is
not to have lots of ideas,
but to live one of them.”*

Ugo Bernasconi

Guidelines for Literacy Instruction¹

Create a Literate Classroom Environment

- ✓ Fill the atmosphere with talk about language and literacy use, and with talk about the ways in which people learn. *Use the Oral History Project as an opportunity for people to understand their own ways of learning and using language.*
- ✓ Constantly link reading and writing to learners' daily lives. Flexibility is important; seize the moment! *Oral history – the history and people of the community – is about people's lives! But literacy programs should also address the day-to-day personal issues that learners always bring to a program.*
- ✓ Treat learners as though they are avid readers and writers. *People will be motivated to read and write if they feel ownership of the oral history project and a passionate interest in their topic.*

Make literacy activities real, student-centred and communicative

- ✓ Encourage learners to take ownership of the project, to make decisions about their work from the beginning.
- ✓ Use literacy for real purposes. *All the work in your oral history project is communication for a 'real purpose'.*

Connect Content Inside the Class to the Community Outside

- ✓ Build on learners' personal needs, issues and interests in their real lives outside class. Use those contexts and purposes to develop literacy skills. *Working on an oral history project naturally makes the connection to the community for you. Oral histories are the histories of individuals, families and communities.*

Develop Literate Practices through Research

- ✓ Collecting data – through reading, listening, observing and interviewing
- ✓ Recording data – through recording, transcribing and making notes
- ✓ Analyzing data – through finding patterns, comparing and being critical
- ✓ Reporting on the research – through group and community presentations
- ✓ Establishing a community of researchers who understand and support each other's work

¹ Adapted from *Making Meaning Making Change* by Elsa Roberts Auerbach, published by Delta Systems Co. Inc., 1992

The Holistic Approach

The Holistic Approach to Aboriginal Literacy

We cannot divide Inuit knowledge and make it become small segments here and there... We know that the Qablunaat tend to go by the non-holistic view. But we tend to view things as holistic when we deal with Inuit Qaujumajatuqangit. For example, learning, hunting, beliefs and child rearing are all looked upon as one holistic issue. They are all combined into one; they have not been separated in any way... this is the foundation. It came as a whole and it cannot be divided and broken up.

Louis Tapardjuk¹

Statistics Canada says that, as of 1996, Canada has 50 Aboriginal languages, belonging to 11 major language families. In the past 100 years or more, nearly ten once flourishing languages have become extinct. At least a dozen are on the brink of extinction.

Inuktitut is one of the strongest aboriginal languages. However use of Inuktitut is also declining. According to the Canada census of 1986, 92 % of people whose mother tongue is Inuktitut could speak fluently. In 1996 this figure decreased to 84 %. Inuinnaqtun, on the other hand, has been in a very rapid decline and is considered near extinction.

The Aboriginal languages were given by the Creator as an integral part of life. Embodied in Aboriginal languages is our unique relationship to the creator, our attitudes, beliefs, values, and the fundamental notion of what is truth. Aboriginal language is an asset to one's own education, formal and informal. Aboriginal language contributes to greater pride in the history and culture of the community, greater involvement and interest of parents in the education of their children, and greater respect for Elders. Language is the principal means by which culture is accumulated, shared and transmitted from generation to generation. The key to identity and retention of culture is one's ancestral language.²

Priscilla George, Anishnawbe educator and literacy consultant from Ontario, has developed The Rainbow or Holistic Approach to Aboriginal Literacy.

¹ Comment from the Elders' Advisory Meeting in Rankin Inlet, April 2002

² From *Handbook for Aboriginal Language Programming, A Report Prepared for the First Nations Education Steering Committee, Aboriginal Languages Sub-Committee*, by Marianne B. Ignace, in North Vancouver, B.C., April 1998

Our traditional teachings tell us that we are Spirit, Heart, Mind and Body. To have a life of balance, we must recognize and nurture all four parts of ourselves. That is, I suggest that Aboriginal literacy is about recognizing the symbols that come to us through Spirit, Heart, Mind and Body, interpreting them and acting upon them for the improvement of the quality of our lives.

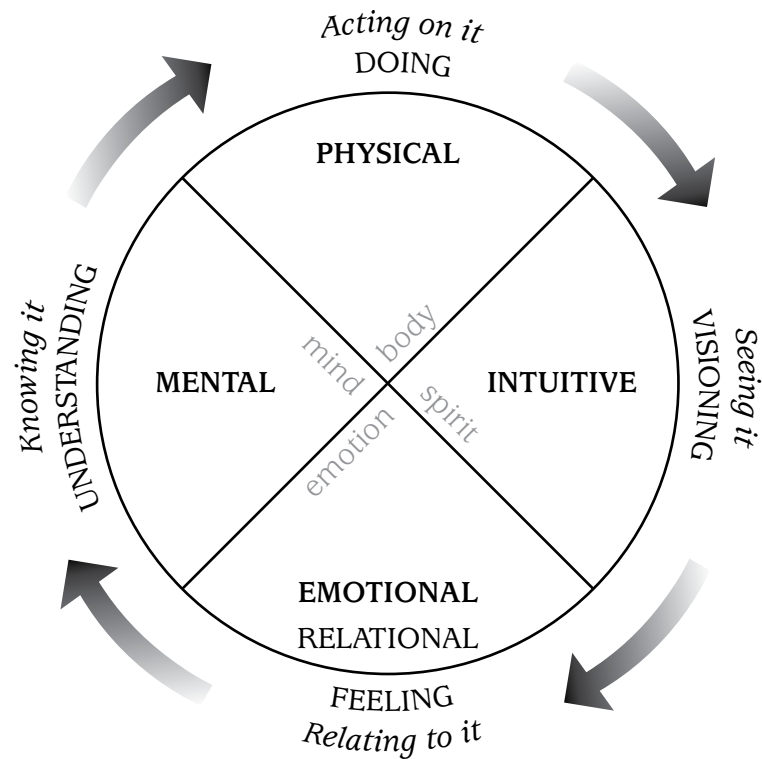
- Spirit – an attitude or insight
- Heart – a feeling about oneself or others
- Mind – knowledge
- Body – a skill³

Priscilla identifies seven different aspects of literacy or ‘ways of knowing’ that are important in the lives of aboriginal people:

1. *First Language Literacy* – communicating in Inuktitut or Inuinnaqtun.
2. *Oral Literacy* – communicating the wisdom from generation to generation orally.
3. *Literacy in the Languages of the Newcomers* – using English and French but reclaiming Aboriginal voices and interpretations of the past.
4. *Technical Literacy* – communicating through technology – computers, on-line learning, getting connected to others through the internet.
5. *Creative Literacy* – communicating through symbols – crafts, art, music, sign language, pictures, drama, clothing design.
6. *Spiritual and Cultural Literacy* – ‘spiritual seeing’ – interpreting dreams, signs, visions or natural events.
7. *Holistic Literacy* – integration of all of the ways of knowing – balancing mind, body, heart and spirit for healing.

³ From *The Rainbow/Holistic Approach to Aboriginal Literacy*: Keynote Address by Ningwakwe (Priscilla George), at “Mamawenig – Sharing and Celebrating our Knowledge” Aboriginal Literacy Gathering, in Fort Qu’Appelle, Saskatchewan, May 14, 2002

Aboriginal Approach to Learning



From "Native Learning Styles" by Michael Johnny, published by Ningwakwe Learning Press, Owen Sound, Ontario, 2002.



Participatory Education:

An Approach to Building Language and Literacy Skills Through Oral History Projects

Literacy is not an end in itself, but rather a means for participants to shape reality, accomplishing their own goals.¹

Pat Campbell

Literacy and learning occurs within complex communities and is interconnected with the social, economic, historical and cultural conditions of those communities. Adult learners come to literacy programs as proficient language users with a wealth of experiences, interests, ideas and concerns. They are not empty vessels to be filled.²

What is Participatory Education?

The concept of participatory education is a complex one – a concept that requires an open mind, reading, time, experience and soul-searching on the part of a facilitator. We offer here just a few introductory ideas about the participatory approach to adult learning. If you are interested in learning more, check the reading list at the end of this section.

Participatory education recognizes and honours the rich lives, skills, knowledge and experiences of adult learners. Instead of focusing on their deficits – on the skills and knowledge they lack, it encourages learners to become partners in creating a learning environment that is meaningful and useful to them. A participatory approach supports learners in taking small, gradual steps towards taking control of their learning and making positive changes within a safe environment. When learners are able to take control within their learning community, it gives them the opportunity to progress towards taking control and making changes in the broader communities in which they live. A participatory approach challenges facilitators and learners not to accept traditional power relationships and to share responsibility for learning environments and outcomes. This is not an easy process; it is one that involves gradual steps toward change. It involves a commitment to question the status quo – unjust situations that have, until now, been accepted by societies as unchangeable.

¹ Pat Campbell in *Teaching Reading to Adults, A Balanced Approach*, pg 142

² From *Educating for Change*, by Carmen Rodriguez, published by Province of BC, Ministry of Skills, Training and Labour, 1994

The Participatory Approach to Oral History and Literacy

There is no curriculum in a participatory program; content is based on learners' interests and experiences. This manual, Unipkausivut, is not a curriculum. Rather, it is a collection of resources that can be used to guide oral history and literacy projects. The intent of the literacy program may be to 'study oral history'. But the very nature of listening to life stories of survival, hardship and triumph within one's own culture will cause learners to reflect on their own important issues – issues such as personal and cultural identity, values, families and life paths. Learners will become engaged in seeing the connections between their own lives and the cultural, historical and social issues that are raised as they explore oral histories. So the content and progress of every literacy and oral history project will be unique – driven by the collective and individual interests and needs of the group.

Pat Campbell, a writer and researcher involved in the literacy field for many years writes about participatory education:

Participatory education is 'a collective effort in which the participants are committed to building a just society through individual and socioeconomic transformation and ending domination through changing power relations. As educators and students work toward building a just society, participants share, create, analyze and act on their knowledge and experiences.'³

Pat Campbell identifies three themes of participatory education:

1. *Community*: Participatory education promotes the development of community by combining literacy education with social action and interaction.
2. *Social Relations*: Participatory education examines and challenges unequal power relations within our societies.
3. *Knowledge*: Learning is built around the knowledge that learners have developed from their social, cultural, and political experiences.⁴

³ *Participatory Practices in Adult Education*, edited by Pat Campbell and Barbara Burnaby, published by Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2001

⁴ *Teaching Reading to Adults, A Balanced Approach*, by Pat Campbell, published by the University of Alberta, 2003

Participatory Education: Sharing the Power⁵

In a traditional classroom, teachers and curriculum developers control the learning process. They identify what is to be taught, how it is to be taught, and how to assess students' learning. In contrast, participatory learning is a collaborative process in which teachers and students share the decisions about content, teaching and learning styles, and assessment.

The essential issue for participatory educators is maintaining a perspective on the degree to which power is shared. This means that teachers and students ask questions such as these:

- ☒ Who selects the materials?
- ☒ By whose standards are learners' abilities assessed?
- ☒ Who defines the learners' goals?
- ☒ Who evaluates learners' progress and the learning process?

So much of everyone's educational experiences stem from a top-down, teacher-knows-all model that it is difficult to manage such a fundamentally different relationship between literacy facilitators and learners. More time is needed to prepare for classes as well as for reflecting on your role as a teacher, learner and facilitator. Learners need concrete ways to take more control of their learning and actively participate in defining their goals and ways of learning.

Here are some characteristics of a participatory approach:⁶

- *Learners are involved in developing the curriculum* at every stage in the process. Ideally this would mean that learners identify issues to explore, decide on materials to use, produce their own materials, determine outcomes of the program and evaluate their own learning. However full participation won't happen immediately for learners who are used to teacher-lead learning environments and have little faith in their own abilities. As learners gain self-confidence, they will gradually participate in identifying the direction of the group's learning.

⁵ From *It Brought a Richness to Me*, A Resource Manual for Participatory Literacy Practitioners, by King, Estes, Fingeret and McCullough, produced by Literacy South, Durham, NC, 1993, page II-3

⁶ From *Making Meaning, Making Change*, by Elsa Roberts Auerbach, published by Center for Applied Linguistics, 1992, and *Teaching Reading to Adults, A Balanced Approach*, by Pat Campbell, published by the University of Alberta, 2003

- *Needs assessment is an ongoing process.* The group analyzes needs, interests, strengths and concerns as the project progresses. Through ongoing needs assessment learners take control over their own learning and begin to examine their own social contexts. Individuals receive support from the group in thinking critically about their situation and moving toward change.
- *The classroom is a model.* What happens inside the classroom shapes the possibilities outside the classroom. Making changes within the literacy program models a way of addressing issues in the broader community.
- *The focus is on strengths, not on weaknesses.* Learners are seen as experts in their own lives. They are the ones that decide the content and skills that are necessary for them to know in their personal situation, not a curriculum developer. The information that learners research and analyze within the oral history project is their own knowledge, not the knowledge of ‘an expert’.
- *The facilitator’s role is that of a problem-poser rather than a problem solver.* The facilitator guides learners towards finding answers to their own questions. The facilitator is also a learner; so is not expected to be ‘an expert’ in oral history. The group explores questions, answers and issues together. As the literacy group progresses through its examination of the oral history theme, the facilitator will find ‘teachable moments’ to share language and literacy knowledge which will help strengthen learners’ skills.
- *The content comes from the learners’ social context.* For literacy to be relevant, classroom activities must relate to learners’ lives outside the classroom. Learners develop literacy skills by speaking, listening, reading and writing about important social issues that affect their lives. The flow will be from oral history to the personal and back to oral history. When the learners see that the facilitator builds literacy experiences based on the flow of their interests, they will become motivated to participate in determining content.
- *Content also comes from interactions of the group.* Negotiating classroom dynamics and processes is an important part of the content. This doesn’t mean that the facilitator comes to the class with no plan. But what happens when the facilitator tries to implement the plan depends on group needs and processes.

- *Outcomes can't be predicted if the content and processes are coming from the learners.* Rather than feeling guilty about not following a 'lesson plan', facilitators welcome opportunities to address real learning as the learners determine their needs and goals.
- *The experiences of individuals are linked to the broader social, cultural and political situation.* Discussion of learners' personal issues leads to a critical analysis of why things are the way they are and how they can be changed.

Instructional Strategies for a Participatory Oral History Project

In this manual space does not allow us to describe instructional strategies in detail. We encourage you to check out the resources in these two sections for more information: *Adult Education and Literacy Resources* and *Selected Literacy Resources in the Useful Resources* section.

Here are a few ideas to consider and explore further in other resources:

- ☒ Remain aware that it's possible to integrate all the learners' goals into the oral history project. Look for opportunities to develop a wide variety of skills as the project progresses: Inuktitut or Inuinnaqtun literacy, English literacy, computer literacy, numeracy or math, personal development, job preparation and social, historical and cultural awareness.
- ☒ As the literacy group members engage in reading, writing, listening and speaking in any language, observe the gaps in their skills and knowledge. Teach mini-lessons in grammar, spelling, punctuation, pronunciation, writing skills, vocabulary and numeracy *in context*, as these skills are needed. You may find the whole group wants or needs to learn a certain skill; or perhaps you will teach a mini-lesson to a small group of learners.
- ☒ Allow for many opportunities for small and large group discussions to give group members a chance to hear different opinions and knowledge and to allow them to build their own ideas in their own time.

- ☑ Use journal writing as an opportunity for learners to write freely – without worrying about the mechanics of grammar and spelling.
 - *Personal journals* are a way for literacy group members to explore and write about their feelings and ideas as they react to events and as they change and grow throughout the project.
 - In *learning journals*, learners analyze and record their own thinking and learning processes. It's valuable to discuss these processes explicitly in the group in order to raise learners' awareness and ability to be self-reflective.
 - *Dialogue journals* or *response journals* are informal written discussions between two learners or between learners and the facilitator. Journals can provide valuable insight and feedback from the group.
- ☑ Use the *language experience approach* with beginning literacy learners. The learner speaks his or her thoughts orally and someone writes their exact words. This becomes a reading text for the learner.
- ☑ If finding written materials at the appropriate reading level is a problem, the facilitator can create reading material based on the group's interactions. Write up summaries of group discussions, videos, interviews or other experiences. Use language that learners can clearly understand. As they progress, challenge them by creating documents that are slightly more difficult.
- ☑ Model using visuals such as time lines, pictures and charts. When learners are comfortable creating visuals themselves, they will have valuable tools to help them organize information and understand concepts.
- ☑ Use the writing process, including peer consultation and editing, writing response groups, or consultation with the facilitator to work through various drafts of written compositions. Keep all the drafts and rewrites in a writing folder or binder.
- ☑ Encourage learners to watch for new vocabulary as they listen to Elders or read written material. Learners can create personal dictionaries in small notebooks, a section in a binder, or index cards to record new vocabulary and meanings. Discuss how new vocabulary relates to root words and familiar words. Learners can identify new vocabulary words for the whole group to

learn. Or each individual or small group could generate its own vocabulary list. The group may want to have weekly formal tests; or people may prefer to work in pairs or small groups to practice and review vocabulary words.

- ☑ Use the portfolio method or other forms of self-assessment to evaluate work instead of formal marking. This allows learners to become more analytical about their own work – a skill which will be useful in many other aspects of their lives.
- ☑ Encourage regular debriefing as the project progresses. Group discussion about how a part of the project has gone encourages critical analysis and evaluation.
- ☑ Encourage the group to celebrate its successes – both individual and group achievements. Talk about hopes and plans for the future and how the project has affected your views and approach to life.

Books about Participatory Education

Teaching Adults to Read: A Balanced Approach, by Pat Campbell, published by Grass Roots Press and the University of Alberta in 2003. ISBN: 1-894593-18-9. Available from Grass Roots Press. Read the final chapter of this book for a good overview of participatory education.

Educating for Change: Community-Based/Student-Centred Literacy Programming with First Nations Adults, by Carmen Rodriguez, published by Province of BC, Ministry of Advanced Education, revised in 2001. ISBN: 0-7726-4606-6. Available from Grass Roots Press.

Learning about Participatory Approaches in Adult Literacy Education: Six Research in Practice Studies, edited by Mary Norton and Grace Malicky, published by Learning at the Centre Press, Edmonton, in 2000. ISBN: 0-9687155-3-2. Available from learningcentre@compusmart.ab.ca. Tel: 780-429-0675

Participatory Practices in Adult Education, edited by Pat Campbell and Barbara Burnaby, published by Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Inc., New Jersey, in 2001. ISBN: 0-8058-3705-1. Available from Grass Roots Press.

Educating for a Change, by Arnold, Burke, James, Martin and Thomas, published by Between the Lines and the Doris Marshall Institute for Education and Action, Toronto, 1991, ISBN: 0-921284-48-9

"It Brought a Richness to Me" A Resource Manual for Participatory Literacy Practitioners, by King, Estes, Fingeret and McCullough, produced by Literacy South, Durham, NC, 1993. Available from Literacy South, Snow Building, Rm 202, 331 W. Main St., Durham, NC 27701 Tel: 919-682-8108

Making Meaning, Making Change, by Elsa Roberts Auerbach, published by Center for Applied Linguistics, Illinois, 1992, ISBN: 0-93-735479-1

*"We realize that verbal practices
were not enough to keep our languages alive.
We needed the much appreciated skills
of others who were able to
put our languages into writing
and so preserve them for the future."*

*Foreword in Ngaapa Wangka Wangkajunga, A Dictionary of the
Wangkajunga language from the Great Sandy Desert of Australia*

From *Spoken Here* by Mark Abley, published by Random House Canada, 2003

Making Links to History

Participating in an oral history project makes history come alive; it allows people to see that we are all makers of history. But the oral history project is also an opportunity to link your interviews and other research to the big picture historically, to allow the literacy group to see how events in the north, in Canada and in the world affected the lives of their ancestors and the people they interviewed. In turn, people's lives today have been affected.

You might ask questions like these to help the literacy group make links to the big historical picture:

- How do the stories we heard fit together? About what date did they happen? Which happened first, second, third?
- How do interviews on different themes link together?
- How does our oral history project relate to other oral history projects that have been done?
- What was happening in the rest of Canada and in Europe at the time of the stories we heard?
- What Canadian government policies affected the stories we've heard?
- How has the information we learned from our oral history project affected us and our lives today?

Your oral history project is also an opportunity for the literacy group to see the connection between the 'real world' and books. There are many books written about the north that offer different perspectives on an historical issue or event. Many of these books are in English and some are written at quite a high reading level. But you will be able to use selected passages from northern books to gain insight on the different factors that were at work in the time and place you have been studying.

History Workshop¹

Learners as Researchers

Two experienced American history teachers, Karen L. Jorgensen and Cynthia Stokes Brown, developed a method for teaching history in the public school system that allows students to study history in a workshop environment where they can actually practice being historians. They believe that students have to actually ‘see and do something and figure out for themselves...’ Teachers can’t just ‘stand there and tell them.’² Their ideas apply to adult literacy programs as well as to the school system.

The idea is that history is not just facts. History, written by historians, is a series of stories told by people with different viewpoints. These people interpret the facts of the past according to their own beliefs. The historical writer’s view of history is never objective. Jorgensen and Brown’s history workshops expose students to a variety of first hand sources and encourage them to compare, analyze and think critically about what they see, hear and read, and then to produce a piece of historical writing themselves. They believe that students learn history better if they are ‘given a chance to make sense of the past, to create their own meaning, to write and construct their own beliefs about history’ rather than to focus on learning a lot of facts.

People develop an understanding of history by making guesses, predictions or theories about historical artifacts, stories, photographs, diaries or films. As they discuss their ideas with others and learn more about a topic, they either confirm their predictions and theories or develop new ones, based on new information. This is the way professional historians work. History workshops give people the opportunity to work as historians rather than having to accept someone else’s theories and predictions.

Adults, just as profoundly, need to ‘see and do and figure out for themselves’. Adults bring many past experiences, opinions, beliefs and values to the literacy class, all of which help them interpret new information in personal ways.

¹ This section is adapted from *Connecting with the Past: History Workshop in Middle and High Schools*, by Cynthia Stokes Brown, published by Heinemann, 1994

² From *Connecting with the Past: History Workshop in Middle and High Schools*, by Cynthia Stokes Brown

The History Workshop Method could complement an adult or intergenerational oral history project. Use it when you want to make links to written histories. Use it when you want a more structured way to explore research sources. Use it to compare the words of historians, explorers, missionaries and traders with the oral stories you hear from the Elders. Use it to encourage critical thinking and analysis during the research phase of the project, to inspire excitement about history, and to help literacy group members make sense of their own lives from a historical perspective.

Learners can then express their understanding of historical themes and build their literacy skills through writing a piece of historical fiction. (See *Historical Fiction or 'Faction'* in the *Writing Projects* section.)

The Elements of a History Workshop

1. *Understanding History*

By looking at many different research sources, learners come to understand that the different opinions expressed in historical sources come from people with different perspectives and backgrounds. Literacy group members learn to compare, analyze and think critically about the material they see, hear and read. They learn that their viewpoints are just as valuable and just as legitimate as the views they read in a book or see expressed in a video.

Start the History Workshop by discussing and recording what you, as a group, already know about a topic and then ask what people would like to know. Keep the list of questions and let them guide your research throughout the project. You will answer some of the questions and probably add more questions as you learn more.

2. *Firsthand Sources*

A History Workshop, like an oral history project, relies on learning from firsthand sources, not only from history textbooks. Firsthand sources are those created by eyewitnesses or participants in an event. They include written sources such as journals, personal letters, correspondence from official sources or ship's logs. But they also include oral stories, artifacts, visual images (photos, maps, drawings), recordings and living people.

Try to provide learners with a variety of different sources that come from different perspectives, so they can see the issues from different viewpoints. Most of the written pieces should be short – one or two pages or less.

For example, if you were studying a relocation that happened near your community in the 1950's, you might find information in the book, *Tammarniit: Inuit Relocation in the Eastern Arctic 1939-63*, by Frank James Tester and Peter Kukchyski. This book contains quotes from documents found in many places: The National Archives of Canada, Prince of Wales Northern Heritage Centre, General Synod Archives of the Anglican Church of Canada, the ship's log of the St. Roch, government documents and reports, the RCMP Quarterly Magazine and Beaver Magazine. You could read the quotes from these sources in *Tammarniit* or request complete copies of the documents yourselves. *Tammarniit* is a book that is critical of government decisions made during this period and is sympathetic to the position of the Inuit at the time. Another book, *Arctic Smoke and Mirrors* by Gerard Kenney takes the opposite position. Both these books are written at a high reading level, but working together on short passages learners will understand the concepts, even if they can't read the passages word for word. It could be interesting to compare the perspectives in both books, as well as comparing information from the books with stories from local people.

When learners read a firsthand document they could answer questions like these:

- ☒ Who wrote it? What kind of person? What point of view?
- ☒ When did they write it?
- ☒ Where did they write it?
- ☒ What does it tell us?
- ☒ How and why was the document produced?
- ☒ And how does that affect its trustworthiness?
- ☒ What is it silent about? What does it leave out?
- ☒ Does the author think we all share the same beliefs? If so, which beliefs?
- ☒ What audience was it written for?

3. *Multiple Perspectives*

Use sources that come from different perspectives. Give learners the opportunity to understand the issues from different viewpoints, to explore the thinking of people that made decisions that affected their ancestors' lives. Relocation, sending children to residential schools, and the killing of sled dogs are just a few examples of difficult historical issues that might arise in the course of an oral history project. Read documents that show the RCMP position, the church position, the government position, as well as the position of people who lived through these events.

Encourage people to move beyond blame or condemnation to exploring the thinking of the people involved. Use questions like the list in #2 to gain insight. Try to understand the social situation and commonly held beliefs at the time of the event.

4. *Journal Writing*

Quick-writes – writing in journals for ten minutes at the beginning of a literacy session can be a good daily routine. Quick-writes improve writing fluency and help people develop their ideas on an issue. Literacy group members could respond to questions that arise from their research, or they could respond to artifacts, a recorded interview, video or guest speaker you've recently seen.

Explain the process to the learners: The idea is to write quickly without planning; just get the ideas down as they pop into your brain – don't worry about the perfect way to express yourself and definitely don't worry about sentence structure or spelling. Just write as the thoughts come – stream of consciousness!

As the literacy facilitator, you may find it helpful to ask permission to read the quick-writes to gain an understanding of how your literacy group is thinking and feeling about the issues that come up in your project. It may show you gaps in understanding and give you ideas on other approaches to add to your project. Consider using dialogue journals, in which you respond to the writings of the group members, creating an ongoing conversation.

5. *History Talk Groups*

History Talk Groups are designed to allow small groups of people to respond to firsthand sources. The literacy group can break into small groups to discuss a written document, visual image, guest speaker, recording or artifact.

If there are a number of firsthand sources, you could create 'resource centres' – a series of tables that each contain one firsthand source and questions to guide the discussion. The small groups move from one 'resource centre' to the next exploring each of the firsthand sources. This process might take several days or a week, with each group visiting just one table a day and discussing the source found there.

You could pose open-ended questions like, "What surprised you?", "What did you find interesting?", "What are your responses to this source material?"

You could create a poster that includes a series of general questions to guide all discussions:

- ☑ What is the name or title of the document? What is the artifact called?
- ☑ When was it written, made, produced?
- ☑ Who wrote it or made it?
- ☑ What do you know about the writer or creator? What would you like to know about him or her?
- ☑ What perspective or bias is shown in the writing?
- ☑ How does the material fit into the history of the time period?
- ☑ Summarize the piece of writing or describe a visual image, recording or artifact.
- ☑ What does it mean? What is its purpose?
- ☑ What don't you understand? What is confusing to you?
- ☑ Ask questions about the document, artifact, visual image or recording.

Group members could take roles: facilitator, recorder, source manager and reporter. The facilitator guides the group through the discussion; the source manager makes sure that everyone has the information or can read the document; the recorder writes down the comments of each person in the group; and the reporter makes an oral presentation to the whole literacy group about their discussion.

History Talk Groups provide a small intimate setting where learners can explore their feelings and ideas about the information contained in the sources.



6. *Lectures and Whole Group Discussion*

As the literacy group explores different sources, people may come up with questions that are not answered in the material you've collected. Write these questions on flip chart paper as they come up. Although the literacy group members will take responsibility for most of the research, it may be your role as literacy facilitator to do some research in order to fill in the gaps and answer the group's questions. You may want to invite a guest speaker. Or you could give mini-lectures, followed by a discussion among all the literacy group members. The large group discussion serves as a model for the discussions in the History Talk Groups. You may want to hand out a one-page chronology showing the dates and events in the time period you are discussing. Whenever you have a few spare moments, focus on discussing the questions collected on the flip chart paper.

7. *The Writing Assignment and Its Process*

The assignment could be to write a piece of biographical or historical fiction about the time period you are studying. This type of writing is called historical fiction because the writers will have to invent some aspects of the story – they won't know exact details about their characters' activities or day-to-day life. But the writers will try to use as many historical facts as they know and to create a setting that is as realistic as possible.

- Talk about the differences between fiction and non-fiction, between narrative and expository writing. Fiction is stories about imaginary people and events; other writing is non-fiction. Narrative writing is 'storytelling'; expository writing involves 'explaining' something.
- Ask literacy group members to choose a fictional character from the place and time you have been studying. It could be an adult, a child, an Inuk, a Qallunaq, an ancestor, a government worker, a priest, a Hudson's Bay manager, an RCMP, a captain or sailor on a ship... anyone who would have lived in that place and time. Or it could be an actual character from oral or written stories.

- Give people some time to think about their characters while the group continues to explore source material. What type of character will he or she be? What personal traits will she or he have? What perspective will the character bring to the story? Will they write in first person “I” or in third person “she” or “he”?
- Ask people to think about the other elements of a story-setting, problem or dilemma, rising tension and resolution of the problem.
- Read other historical fiction to gain an understanding of the elements and style of this type of writing.
- Encourage people to think about the information they learned about that period in history and include as many details as possible in their story.
- You could use a visualization technique to inspire drawings or writing about the setting of their story. (See *Historical Fiction or Faction in the Writing Projects* section.)
- Teach mini-lessons on the writing process, grammar, spelling, punctuation, syllabic keyboarding and any other topics as they come up during the progress of the writing.
- Make available dictionaries, thesauruses and other reference guides, as well as northern magazines, books and resources. (See the *Useful Resources* section.)
- Use peer consultation and editing so people can get feedback during the writing process.
- Learners can type up their stories on the computer and use them for reading material in your literacy group and in future literacy groups.
- Consider adding a title page and illustrations.

*“Languages differ
not just in what its speakers can say,
but in what they must say.”*

*Mark Abley in Spoken Here
on the land claims process in Australia*

- Literacy group members can give an oral presentation to the group explaining their story. You might create a guide to help people prepare their presentation:
 - ☒ First, retell the story.
 - ☒ Why did you choose the character?
 - ☒ What is the character's perspective?
 - ☒ What helped you most in writing this story?
 - ☒ How did you work historical information into the story?
 - ☒ Are there any facts in your story that you wonder if they are historically accurate?
 - ☒ Is there any place where you really got stuck in your writing?
 - ☒ How did you get unstuck?
 - ☒ Did you appear anywhere in your story?
 - ☒ How did writing this story help you understand life in the time and place we are studying?

Literacy group members can take home their own stories to read to their children; or they can share stories and read other group members' stories to their children. Or hold an after-school program for the children of the literacy group and other children. Invite them to your literacy group to read and talk about the stories.

Books about History Workshop

Connecting with the Past: History Workshop in Middle and High Schools, by Cynthia Stokes Brown, published by Heinemann, NH, 1994, ISBN: 0-435-08901-3

History Workshop: Reconstructing the Past with Elementary Students, by Karen L. Jorgensen, published by Heinemann, NH, 1993, ISBN: 0-435-08900-5

Keepsakes, Using Family Stories in Elementary Classrooms, by Linda Winston, published by Heinemann, 1997, ISBN: 0-435-07235-8