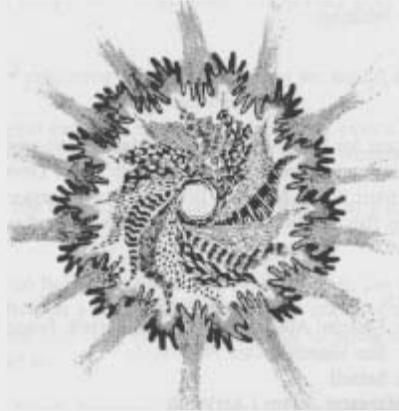


***Making Connections***  
*supplemental document*



***Guided Reflections for Facilitators***  
*(June 1998)*



CLOW / CCPEF

# Introduction

*Making Connections* is a literacy curriculum manual developed by the Canadian Congress for Learning Opportunities for Women (CLOW). It arose out of a recognized need for relevant, woman-positive materials for women literacy learners. *Making Connections* attempts to address the realities of women's lives and to incorporate concerns such as childcare, violence, race, sexuality, self-esteem, disability, etc., into literacy learning.

Twelve literacy workers from across Canada collaborated on creating *Making Connections*. Once the manual was produced, CLOW developed a follow-up project to support literacy workers and instructors who were interested in using it. Fifteen facilitators from across Canada were contracted to develop and present workshops on the *Making Connections* curriculum. These facilitators came together face-to-face twice: first, to discuss the nature of the workshops they would give and, second (one year later), to discuss their experiences in giving the workshops.

This document came out of the second meeting, as a way for the facilitators to share among themselves and with others the details of their workshops, and their findings and reflections on having presented *Making Connections* as a literacy tool. A questionnaire entitled "Guided Reflections" was developed by a small group of facilitators at the second meeting and what follows is a compilation of the responses. Comments from evaluations forms filled out by participants in the *Making Connections* workshops are also incorporated and these are enclosed in parentheses to differentiate them from the feedback of facilitators.

## **Facilitators**

Evelyn Battell has been an Adult Basic Education instructor in Alberta and B.C. for more than 20 years. She has written curriculum for students at many levels, in many subjects and many learning situations.

Slowly her understanding is growing of what it means to teach the whole person. Facilitating Workshops on *Making Connections* gave her a wonderful opportunity to explore, with others, good curriculum which takes into account some of the factors that are often ignored in the teaching of women.

**Deanne Bradley** is culturally Deaf and has worked in the Deaf literacy environment for five years as a literacy instructor (instructing English through American Sign Language in a pre-literacy program). She is a feminist and advocate and served on the Board of G.O.L.D. (Goal: Ontario Literacy for the Deaf) for four years. She believes in the importance of issues surrounding women and literacy and first became interested in the area upon learning women's stories.

**Nzula Angelita Ciatu** is a community organizer and activist. She is a feminist, counsellor and educator presently working as a facilitator in a Bridging program for immigrant women who are survivors of abuse. Her interest lies in anti-oppressive methodologies and popular education.

**Nancy Cooper** is from the Chippewas of Mnjikaning First Nation and lives in Toronto. She has been working in the Native Literacy field for the past seven years. She is inspired by poetry and animals.

**Maureen Doherty** recently re-located to Ontario from Iqaluit (soon to be Nunavut) in order to pursue her M.Ed. in Adult Education/Community Development at OISE in Toronto. She lived and worked in the eastern Arctic for 15 years as a teacher, adult educator and as Coordinator of Community Programs for Nunavut Arctic College. She was an active Justice of the Peace in the NWT for 8 years, and is also a proud mother of three boys.

**Priscilla George** is a Deer Clan Ojibway from the Chippewas of Saugeen First Nation in Southern Ontario. Her Anishnawbe Spirit Name is Ningwakwe, which means "Rainbow Woman." Priscilla has taught for the primary and junior grades, English as a Second Language and Special Education for the Toronto Board of Education, where she was employed for fourteen years. She has also been an Addictions Counsellor, and an Academics and Life Skills Coach at Wanepuhnud Corporation, an off-site program through George Brown College. Priscilla has been involved in literacy since 1987, is a founding member of the Ontario Native Literacy Coalition, and is its current Learning Outcomes Coordinator. She has authored a number of articles and books on Native literacy as a tool in individual/community development/empowerment.

Priscilla has two children; Denise, 31, who is an actress and a children's entertainer, and Dennis, 26, who is in his fourth year at the University of Toronto's School of Dentistry.

**Julianne Hodgins** has a TESL certificate, is a freelance facilitator and has worked as a front line social service worker for many years. She has been a feminist for a long time and possesses an ongoing interest in creating joyous teaching environments.

**Janet Isserlis** has worked with refugees, immigrants and visiting students in the United States and Canada since 1980. She has taught in community-based organizations, schools, adult learning centres, worksites and housing projects. Her work has focused on literacy and language development, primarily with adults, most often with women. She worked with parents and community members in elementary schools as part of the Rainmaker Project and as a volunteer tutor in Vancouver, B.C.

**Kate Nonesuch** has thought and written about women and literacy for many years. She is literacy co-ordinator and instructor at Malaspina University-College, Cowichan Campus (Duncan, BC. ), co-author of a series of science books for basic readers and inventor of the Never-Fail Writing Method.

**Mary Norton** is a teacher and program coordinator at the Learning Centre in Edmonton. She is also involved in research and writing related to adult literacy.

**Linda Shohet** is the founder and director of The Centre for Literacy of Quebec, an independent charitable organization in Montreal. Priority issues for the Centre in the last few years have been literacy and health, literacy and technology and literacy and women. Linda teaches English at Dawson College in

Montreal, specializing in developmental/basic writing and in writing about science and technology. Since 1984 she has worked in the field of school-based and adult literacy and she has served as President of Literacy Partners of Quebec, a provincial coalition of English-language literacy groups.

**Janet Smith** is a popular adult educator and community development worker from Brandon, Manitoba. She has worked as a researcher and project coordinator in the literacy field since 1992 and has published two booklets, "Where There is Life There is Hope: Women Literacy Students' Experiences with Discrimination" and "Literacy, Welfare and Work."

**Arlene Wells** has worked as an adult educator since 1981, primarily in community-based learning programs for women. She was part of a group of Victoria women who founded Bridges, a learning program for women survivors of abuse. For the past two years, she has been studying Intercultural Education and Training at the University of Victoria.

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## **Profile of Participants**

Each facilitator gave an average of four workshops. The number of participants varied from three to fifty, with an average of twelve. Settings included literacy and EAL programs, educator professional development days and/or conferences, a women's conference, an adult education development class, secondary schools, university colleges, adult education centres, a Native cultural centre, the Toronto Native Women's Resource Centre, a women's bookstore, a support/housing service organization for urban poor and personal residences. The participants were adult educators, literacy tutors, university students, university instructors, literacy coordinators, EAL instructors, transition house workers, counsellors, teachers, librarians, therapists, social workers, learners. Their ages ranged from late teens to over seventy with most in about the thirty to fifty range. Eighty-five participants out of 510 were men (16%).

## **What Chapters or Issues from Making Connections did You Focus On?**

Below is a list of either chapter headings or loosely defined subject areas, and the number of facilitators (in descending order) who mentioned using them in their workshops.

<b><u>Chapter Heading or Subject Area</u></b>	<b><u>Number of Times Mentioned</u></b>
What is a Feminist Curriculum?	9
Role Models (ch.6)	6
Self-Esteem and Literacy (ch.3)	5
Violence & disclosure	5
Techniques for including diverse voices (p.334)	4
Women and Work (ch.7)	3
Guiding principles	3
Organization of material (jagged hearts, margin notes, resources)	3
Establishing safety (p.21)	3
Women of Courage: Herstory (ch.13)	2
"My Wife Doesn't Work" (p.45, 59)	2
Daily Lives (ch.1)	2
Proverbs (p.147)	2
Cultural Awareness Activities (ch.5)	2
Poetry by Canadian Women (ch.11)	2
Gender Roles (ch.4)	2
Songs about Women's Issues (ch.10)	2
"The Woman I am in My Dreams" (p.91)	1
"How this Book Came to Be" (p.3)	1
The use of movement	1
"But I'm not a Therapist"	1
Adapting lessons in Making Connections	1

This list is not a completely accurate reflection. For example, a discussion of

how to adapt lessons in Making Connections seems to have taken place in several workshops. However, only one facilitator mentioned this area as a part of Making Connections that was focused on. Also, specific exercises and chapters have been kept separate. This means that, for example, the two facilitators who mentioned using “My Wife Doesn’t Work” are not included in the number of those who mentioned using Chapter 1 (“Daily Lives”) in which this exercise is included.

### **What Was Stimulating for Participants?**

The most common issue that participants found stimulating was “feminism”: what is it, how it is publicly perceived, what makes this curriculum feminist, how feminism relates to the principles of adult education, how the lives and experiences of women can be included in literacy work, how participants might identify themselves as feminist and using the workshop to check this out with others in the literacy field. Some found it surprising to consider that feminism does not exclude men; others began to make connections between their own lives and issues raised in the manual.

Issues of abuse and disclosure, as well as the ways in which women learners are silenced, were also frequently raised with participants interested in how Making Connections could help address them. The interests of some participants were more practical; they wanted to know how to fit this curriculum to government funding criteria or were just eager to get their hands on good material, ideas and resources to use in the classroom.

Most discussions centred around women’s lives and their relationship to literacy. In the words of one facilitator, the workshop “presented an opportunity to discuss women’s issues and learning in depth—something [the participants] had not had an opportunity to do.” The simple opportunity to meet with others (mostly women) working in the literacy field was stimulating, as was the Making Connections manual and the ideas for curriculum it presents.

### **What Challenged Assumptions Among Participants?**

Most frequently, assumptions about feminism were challenged (“I’m pleased I came today. I hadn’t originally signed up due to the label ‘feminist’”). Participants assumed that feminism was “scary,” that it did not include men, that the term was negative, that feminist politics were not relevant to learning. Some participants had not thought about or thought through how women learners might be silenced or feel unsafe in their programs (“The silencing exercise helped me relate better to how adult learners might feel in the learning environment by pointing out situations in which I felt really uncomfortable and vulnerable”).

Assumptions about power, race, class and violence were also challenged. Some participants were challenged with respect to their positions as white instructors of diverse students. Some workshops helped to make visible the connection between power imbalances and silencing.

Some participants in the north had assumed that because Making Connections

was from the south, it would not be relevant.

On workshop evaluation forms, some participants admitted that their assumptions had been challenged in a way that would positively affect their teaching: “The concept of self-esteem as necessary for learning to take place became much clearer to me”; “[M.C. raised] issues I hadn’t thought of before which would be relevant and important to my learners”; “[The workshop helped me to understand that] a male perspective could present limitations.”

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## **What Did Participants Want to Focus On?**

Participants wanted to focus on the need to have appropriate material for diverse learners, such as First Nations learners and Deaf, Deaf/Blind learners, and on how to adapt material to students' contexts. In discussions of feminism, participants wanted to focus on how to bring feminism into the classroom and how to deal with the sensitive issues it raises, such as violence, abuse, oppression and discrimination. Some wanted to discuss the concerns and frustrations of literacy work and to share the high prevalence of sexual abuse and violence in the lives of women learners. Some practitioners wanted to focus on the practicalities of teaching, on delving into Making Connections materials and lessons, and on "what to do Monday morning."

## **Did Particular Groups Raise Particular Issues?**

Issues raised by particular groups focused both on what Making Connections includes and what it leaves out. First Nations participants found that much of the manual was not useable ("Experiences of First Nations People tend to be very different from other ethnic/racial/cultural groups") and they questioned the absence of First Nations history and content. They also found no guidance on how to incorporate First Nations teaching and methodologies into literacy work.

One evaluation form noted that an important issue to address is the actual act of learning within a dominant culture. For example, what is it like for a Black woman to learn within a dominant white culture; what is it like for a lesbian woman to learn within a dominant heterosexual culture; what is it like for a Deaf/Deaf-Blind woman to learn within a dominant hearing culture, etc.?

Some participants found that some exercises had the potential to reinforce racist or sexist assumptions (eg. "The Neighbourhood" on pp.56-57 asks learners to identify racial groups in their neighbourhood then asks whether the place is safe, clean, friendly, healthy or pleasant; dissimilar questions on p.361 in "Herstory" suggest learners can know what an anonymous Native woman is thinking but can only guess what Columbus is thinking; the songs in Chapter 10 portray Western musical styles). Also, the manual does not acknowledge the Latin American origins of popular education ("It would have been ideal to have Latin American women's resources more central to the document, with acknowledgement of their pioneering role").

Participants in particular regional areas raised concerns about the diverse locations—northern, rural, urban—of women's lives; some literacy programs (eg. in Youth Detention Centres) are restricted in what they are allowed to teach ("Working with youth requires a special angle as does working within the context of a Youth Detention Centre"). In some cases the content made it difficult to imagine adapting the technique. Participants from more structured programs found that use of the manual raised more questions for them than for those in community-based programs.

Those in the Deaf/Deaf-Blind community found some of the material unadaptable, such as the cassette and other references to hearing culture; none of the Making Connections material is available in large print or braille ("I

would use M.C. in my own setting/context] as long as it will be modified to include deaf issues, visual contents and plain English”).

Some participants raised the issue of poverty and the financial accessibility of the manual. Participants in Nova Scotia felt the material too often assumes that practitioners are working in a group and not one-to-one. Male participants raised concerns about using the manual with both male and female clients and some indicated that there were chapters and topics they would not attempt.

### **What Suggestions did Participants Have for Adaptations?**

A common adaptation suggested by participants was to make Making Connections more basic, to break down difficult material into easier tasks. Many found that not enough levels of ability are represented and that the language is sometimes too complex, especially for those learning English as an additional language (including those whose first language is ASL).

Also suggested was to diversify the content with respect to cultural backgrounds, specifically to include more First Nations history (“The underlying essentials are present, but more culturally specific curriculum needs to be adopted”). First Nations participants also suggested activities that would create more equal sharing between learners and participants, such as talking circles rather than role-playing (“I prefer the tutor/learner, learner/tutor environment whereby both of us can gain knowledge from each other with a sense of accomplishment for both of us”). Inuit participants discussed ways that Making Connections could be altered to form cultural-based theme units to be taught in Inuktitut and they brainstormed ways to include or substitute Inuit content, such as incorporating existing Inuktitut resources, inviting elders or local guests to cover some aspects of the curriculum, inviting a nurse or health worker to present the chapter on safe sex.

Those in the Deaf/Deaf-Blind community felt the manual is too “hearing”-focused. The curriculum should be available in large print and/or Braille and should include more visual activities, such as role-playing, video-tapes and the use of pictures. A significant adaptation has already been made in the creation of an introductory video tape about Making Connections for the Deaf community.

Again, issues with respect to feminism arose, with suggestions to remove the word “feminist” and to use “person” rather than “woman.” A suggestion for reducing the trauma of learners’ experiences with violence was to remove the activities and exercises that refer to violence (but not the content).

### **Areas for Further Reflection and Professional Development**

Generally, there are not many opportunities for professional development and professional support in the adult education field. With specific relevance to this project, more material and professional development is needed to raise practitioners’ awareness of issues of discrimination; racism, sexism and heterosexism were specifically mentioned. There is a need to understand and respect the diverse contexts of learners, including the need for men to

understand and respect issues important to women. More material and tools, and more consultation, are definitely needed from people of colour, First Nations people and those in the Deaf/Deaf-Blind communities.

Almost all participants were interested in another workshop, which speaks to the need for adult education practitioners in all fields to get together to give support and to share their experiences and suggestions for practice, especially feminist practice. More discussion and development is needed on how to adapt any material to the context of women and learning and to working within constraints. Many were interested in hearing from others who are using Making Connections and suggested a that a questionnaire and a business reply envelope be included with every manual.

Some participants expressed an interest in a second book covering different topics and expanding on issues raised in the first.

### **Some Positive Comments from Evaluation Forms**

While many improvements could be made to M.C., it's useful to record some of the positive feedback the manual generated and to acknowledge the aims that are being achieved. On evaluation forms, workshop participants expressed excitement and interest in using M.C., raised issues that have largely been absent from other curriculum discussions and, in some cases, felt justified to make demands of M.C. well beyond its function as a curriculum. Here are some of their comments:

“This workshop has put ‘feminism’ in a more positive perspective.”

“I will use this material to raise concerns with issues of diversity and issues of power.”

“I like that it's a Canadian resource rather than American—very different focus.”

“Provided many ideas!...More suggestions are needed on ways to support and encourage women who are in abusive situations to trust themselves and take the necessary steps toward freedom through knowledge.”

“Having a follow up project that allows someone to walk us through the book is a wonderful approach to really make the resource useable.”

“Please include something to help teachers deal with heterosexist attitudes in the classroom.”

“A much needed resources for starting discussion on overlooked topics.”

“Relevant to the women I work with who are homeless and marginalized.”

“It shows how a feminist perspective can be brought to issues other than those that are stereotypically ‘women's issues’.”

“These issues are primordial to literacy learning; the curriculum is a good reminder of that.”