

CENTRAL MANITOBA LITERACY ASSOCIATION
AGASSIZ HEADWAYS
LIFE SKILLS LITERACY
NLS FILE: 3848 - 00/CO36
Final Report

Project Background:

The project focused on the Life Skill Literacy needs of at risk youth 16-18, who have been committed to a young offender institution and who show no evident interest in returning to traditional schooling upon release. The target population of the study was aboriginal youth largely from remote northern communities where traditional employment of hunting, trapping and guiding remain prevalent. Some of the target population have personal problems with nonprescription drug use and alcohol abuse. A portion of the target population may exhibit some characteristics and behaviors consistent with fetal alcohol spectrum disorders.

Project Methodology:

Following research into life literacy skills, a rating device was prepared. The device consisted of ten life skill literacy task groups. Each task group had a number of component skills specified. Two rating processes were completed by respondents:

- i) rating the component tasks in each group
- ii) rating the task groups

The device was circulated to a sample of residents of Agassiz Youth Centre, Portage la Prairie, Manitoba (N=10), a sample of Agassiz Youth Centre staff (N=8) and a sample of external individuals, all students at Yellowquill College, Winnipeg, Manitoba, an adult education institution that seeks to train aboriginal persons for leadership roles in their community (N=18). The groups completed the ratings devices, returning them to the project leader for analysis.

Analysis was done in the following manner:

1. The life skill literacy task group ranking was compiled for each of the three respondent groups. The combined task group rank of all respondents was prepared using weighted rank technique. (Exhibit A) The objective was to determine the relative level of priority of each task per respondent groups and the combined respondent priority rating.
2. The life skill literacy task group rankings were reviewed considering the level of priority the respondent group had placed upon the specific task. Tasks ranked 1-3 were denoted as most important, those ranked 4-7 were denoted as of some importance and those ranked 8-10 were denoted as least important. (Exhibit B) The objective was to determine if there was any correlation between the kinds of

- literacy skill and the importance ranking given.
3. The life skill literacy skills making up each task grouping were ranked by each of the three respondent groups. The combined skill rank of all respondents was prepared using weighted rank technique. (Exhibit C) The objective was to determine the priority skills in each task group and compare the results across respondent groups.
 4. Observations were made about the data compiled.

Concurrently the project leader investigated resources that are available and appropriate, or that could be adapted for use in assisting the target population in mastering the various life skill literacy tasks. A bibliography of resources was compiled.

Project Results:

Task Group Ratings:

Residents viewed reading as the highest priority life skill literacy task. This was concurred by the external respondents. Residents ranked listening as the second most important life skill literacy task for them to learn. External raters placed thinking as second in order of importance. Residents placed speaking of third most importance and the external group noted understanding information in the third place rank.

Residents, external respondents and staff all rated computers as the least most important life skill literacy task. This was the only skill where all respondent groups were in accord.

Residents saw life literacy skills related to money of second lowest importance with measurement holding the position of third lowest importance. External raters placed measurement of second lowest importance, with money skills holding the place of third lowest importance.

Youth Centre staff rated thinking and speaking in the first two rank placements. Reading was ranked as the third most important life literacy skill. Staff ranked mathematics in the third from last position, followed by measurement and computers.

Rank scores of the residents corresponded to those of the external raters in 4 instances, but with those of staff in only one instance. Staff ranks agreed with external rater ranks in two instances only.

When a combined weighted rank of life skill literacy tasks per all respondents was devised, reading ranked first, thinking second and speaking third. The lowest priority was placed on the life skill literacy tasks (in declining order) of money, measurement and computers.

When comparing the rankings of the three respondent groups to the combined weighted rank devised across respondent groups, there was a 50% correlation between the resident responses and the combined rank, a 30% correlation between the staff responses and the combined rank and a 60% correlation between the external responses and the combined rank. The correlation was 40% between the resident responses and the external group responses. The correlation was only 10% between the resident responses and the staff group responses and 20% between the staff responses and those of the external group.

Internal Significance:

The task group internal rankings, by respondent group, were reviewed. Residents placed most importance on the literacy tasks of reading and writing. Numeracy tasks of money and measurement were of least importance, as was the technology task of computer use. The numeracy task of mathematics was viewed as being of some importance. Speaking and cognition tasks (speaking, understanding information, listening and thinking) were rated of some importance. Listening was the only task where respondents equally split their responses between the categories of most and some importance.

Staff placed the literacy tasks of reading and writing and the numeracy skill of mathematics in the some importance grouping. The speaking and cognition skills of listening and thinking were viewed as being of most importance. In the same category, speaking and understanding information shared equal rating between most importance and another importance category. Least importance was noted for the technology skill of computers and the numeracy skill of the measurement.

External respondents placed most importance on the literacy skills of reading and writing. The numeracy skill of mathematics was rated as being of some importance, while other numeracy skills were viewed as being of low priority. The technology skill of computers was viewed of least importance. The speaking and cognition skill of speaking was rated of most importance, while the tasks of understanding information, listening and thinking were rated of some importance.

Task Skill Ratings:

When the rankings of skills comprising each task group were reviewed, the following trends were apparent:

Reading: Residents believed reading to learn new things was most important, followed by reading instructions. External raters agreed. Least important to residents was reading for enjoyment, while external raters said reading of graphs and charts was least important. Staff favoured reading of instructions most, followed by reading of picture symbols. Reading of charts and graphs was least important to the staff group. In the combined weighted ranking, reading to learn new things and reading of instructions were most favoured with reading of charts and graphs ranking lowest priority.

Money: All respondent groups rated the skill of counting money as most important. Residents saw balancing a cheque book as least valuable, while the staff and external respondents placed use of a bank machine in lowest priority. Resident and external

groups believed being able to compare the cost of items is of second importance. The combined ranking reflected the highest priority task consistently and tied balancing a cheque book and use of a bank machine as being of equally low value.

Speaking: Resident and staff respondents believed the most important speaking skill to be the ability to ask questions for information. The external group sited use of appropriate language as high priority, while residents placed the skill as second. Of least importance to residents, (achieving tied rankings), were giving directions and describing an event. External raters placed giving directions last and describing an event one place above. Combined ranking placed asking questions for information as first followed by use of appropriate language. Least importance was placed on giving directions.

Computer: All respondents viewed word processing as the most valuable life literacy computer skill, followed by searching of text files. With some variance between respondent groups, on order of priority of other tasks, the combined weighted ranking placed use of the Internet as second least important with use of spreadsheets as least critical.

Writing: Resident respondents rated being able to read handwriting and writing letters of greatest importance. Staff respondents rated completing forms as most important followed by reading handwriting. External raters rated the skill of letter writing as most important followed by being able to handwrite. There was no concurrence on the least important writing skill. In the combined weighting, reading handwriting and writing letters were tied for greatest importance, completing forms and handwriting were tied as second most important and recording information was viewed as least important.

Understanding Information: For this task, all respondents concurred on the most and least important skills. Following directions was rated of most importance and reading maps was rated of least importance. Other comprehension skills were rated as follows by the combined group: second - real vs. imaginary, third - fact vs. opinion and fourth - putting events in order.

Measurement: Staff and external respondents rated measurement of time as most important; otherwise, respondent groups showed no agreement. Residents rated measuring distance as most important and measuring temperature of least importance. Staff rated measurement of weight and volume of least importance while external raters viewed measuring distance and length of least importance. The combined weighted rank ordered the skills in the following declining order: measurement of time, distance and length, temperature and weight and volume.

Mathematics: All respondent groups rated the skill of performing basic operations as most important. Staff raters placed the ability to use a calculator as second most important, while external raters placed calculator use in last position. Resident respondents placed calculator use in second lowest position with being able to calculate percents of lower ranking. Residents saw working with word problems of second greatest importance. This was reflected in the combined weighted ratings. The

combined weighted rating placed the calculation of percents as least important preceded by calculator use.

Listening: Residents rated listening in a group discussion as the most important followed by listening to TV and radio. Listening in conversation was rated lowest. Staff and external respondents rated listening to instructions as most important with listening in a conversation as second most important. In the combined weighted rating, listening to instructions was most important, followed by listening in conversation and in group discussions in second place. Listening to TV and radio rated lowest.

Thinking: Residents rated the ability to make decisions of greatest importance with the skill of comparing things as least important. Staff rated the skill of identifying cause and effect as most important and the skill of comparing as least important. External raters placed understanding needs and wants as most important and rated the skills of comparing things and considering risks in the lowest rank. The combined weighted rank placed thinking about needs and wants first, followed by making decisions and identifying cause and effect tied for second, with considering risks in fourth place and comparing things last.

Conclusions:

1. When a literacy program seeks to address the life skill literacy needs of at risk youth, the staff need to be aware that their perception of the most needed learning may differ from that of the learners and the adults from the home communities of the youth. The degree of concurrence between the subject matter taught and the priority given to the task by the participants may effect the willingness of learners to invest in the learning process. Staff would be wise to consider the learner's ranking of life skill literacy tasks when designing programs. The alternative would be to use a ranking of life skill literacy tasks derived from the responses of a combined respondent group.
2. Based on resident responses and the responses of external raters, the life skill literacy tasks related to literacy are of most importance, followed by the numeracy skill of mathematics and speaking and cognition skills. Numeracy skills of money and measurement are least important, along with the technology skill of computer use. When a literacy instructor wishes to include the skills of speaking and cognition in a literacy curriculum, they will need to be presented in a cross curricular manner as opposed to in discrete lessons. Technology could be incorporated via word processing in the writing component of literacy skills.
3. As life skill literacy is taught to learners on an individualized basis, the priority of the skills derived from this study could be used as a reference point for investigating the specific interests of a learner. The combined weighted ranks of the skills could be used as an indicator of population priorities in cases where a learner is not familiar with their potential need for stated material.

Opportunities for Further Study:

The study could be replicated with larger sample sizes in each respondent group to determine if the results remain consistent. Another respondent group of youth with educational aspirations and who reside in northern or remote communities might be added.

Exhibit A

LIFE SKILLS LITERACY TASK GROUP RATINGS

(Rating Organized by Respondent Group)

TASK GROUP	Score: AYC RESIDENTS	AYC-R Rank	Score: AYC STAFF	AYC-S Rank	Score: EXTERNAL GROUP	EXTERNAL Rank	Total of Rating Rank (all groups)	Combined Weighted Rank
Reading	29	1	30	3	45	1	5	1
Money	82	9	49	7	130	8	24	8
Speaking	37	3	27	2	89	5	10	3
Computer	85	10	80	10	14	10	30	10
Writing	37	3	47	6	69	3	12	4
Understanding Information	56	6	41	5	74	4	15	6
Measurement	74	8	65	9	140	9	26	9
Mathematics	60	7	52	8	101	7	22	7
Listening	35	2	31	4	97	6	12	4
Thinking	47	5	19	1	65	2	8	2

Exhibit B

LIFE SKILLS LITERACY TASK GROUPS

Measure of Internal Significance per Task Group

(Rating Organized by Respondent Group)

TASK GROUP	IMPORTANCE						IMPORTANCE						IMPORTANCE					
	Most		Some		Least		Most		Some		Least		Most		Some		Least	
	AYC Res	AYC Res	AYC Res	AYC Res	AYC Res	AYC Res	AYC Staff	AYC Staff	AYC Staff	AYC Staff	AYC Staff	AYC Staff	EXT Grp	EXT Grp	EXT Grp	EXT Grp	EXT Grp	EXT Grp
	%		%		%		%		%		%		%		%		%	

Sample Size: 10

Sample Size: 8

Sample Size: 18

TASK GROUP	AYC Res	AYC Res	AYC Res	AYC Res	AYC Res	AYC Res	AYC Staff	AYC Staff	AYC Staff	AYC Staff	AYC Staff	AYC Staff	EXT Grp	EXT Grp	EXT Grp	EXT Grp	EXT Grp	EXT Grp
Reading	7	70.0	2	20.0	1	10.0	3	37.5	5	62.5	0	0.0	14	77.8	4	22.2	0	0.0
Money	0	0.0	2	20.0	8	80.0	1	12.5	6	75.0	1	12.5	1	5.6	7	38.9	10	55.6
Speaking	5	50.0	4	40.0	1	10.0	4	50.0	4	50.0	0	0.0	9	50.0	5	27.8	4	22.2
Computer	0	0.0	2	20.0	8	80.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	8	100.0	2	11.1	4	22.2	12	66.7
Writing	6	60.0	3	30.0	1	10.0	1	50.0	4	50.0	3	37.5	11	61.1	6	33.3	2	11.1
Understanding Information	2	20.0	6	60.0	2	20.0	3	25.0	2	25.0	3	37.5	5	27.8	11	61.1	2	11.1
Measurement	0	0.0	3	30.0	7	70.0	0	25.0	2	25.0	6	75.0	0	0.0	6	33.3	12	66.7
Mathematics	1	10.0	9	90.0	0	0.0	1	62.5	5	62.5	2	25.0	4	22.2	9	50.0	5	27.8
Listening	5	50.0	5	90.0	0	0.0	5	12.5	1	12.5	2	25.0	4	22.2	10	55.6	4	22.2
Thinking	4	40.0	5	50.0	1	10.0	6	25.0	2	25.0	0	0.0	8	44.4	9	50.0	1	5.6

Exhibit C

LIFE SKILLS LITERACY TASK SKILL RATINGS

(Ratings Organized by Respondent Group)

TASK GROUP	SKILL	Score: AYC RESIDENTS	AYC-R Rank	Score: AYC STAFF	AYC-S Rank	Score: EXTERNAL GROUP	EXTERNAL Rank	Total of Rating Rank (all groups)	Combined Weighted Rank
Reading	for enjoyment	37	5	37	4	55	3	12	4
	to learn new things	15	1	24	3	38	1	5	1
	of graphs and charts	35	4	38	5	83	5	14	5
	of picture symbols	32	3	22	2	67	4	9	3
	of instructions	31	2	16	1	41	2	5	1
Money	balance a cheque book	38	5	34	4	73	4	13	4
	use a bank machine	33	3	40	5	80	5	13	4
	count money	17	1	10	1	32	1	3	1
	compare cost of items	28	2	29	3	46	2	7	2
	make change	33	3	21	2	53	3	8	3
Speaking	be part of a conversation	41	4	26	2	55	3	9	3
	give directions	47	5	35	3	92	6	14	6
	describe an event	47	5	35	3	84	5	13	4
	ask questions for information	19	1	15	1	52	2	4	1
	take part in group discussions	32	3	43	6	74	4	13	4
	use appropriate language	24	2	37	5	40	1	8	2
Computer	word process	20	1	11	1	25	1	3	1
	use internet	31	4	26	3	53	2	9	3
	use spreadsheets	26	3	32	4	60	4	11	4
	search text files	23	2	21	2	53	2	6	2
Writing	record information	31	4	27	2	66	5	11	5
	complete forms	36	5	21	1	61	4	10	3
	handwriting	29	3	32	5	51	2	10	3
	write letters	27	1	28	4	47	1	6	1
	read handwriting	27	1	27	2	55	3	6	1

Understanding Information	real vs. imaginary ²	29	3	25	2	51	2	7	2
	put events in order	30	4	29	3	67	4	11	4
	read maps	40	5	39	5	78	5	15	5
	facts vs. opinion	26	2	29	3	54	3	8	3
	follow directions	25	1	13	1	35	1	3	1
Measurement	of time	23	2	11	1	29	1	4	1
	of distance or length	22	1	20	2	72	4	7	2
	of temperature	28	4	26	3	55	2	9	3
	of weight and volume	27	3	33	4	62	3	10	4
Mathematics	use a calculator	40	4	26	2	75	5	11	4
	add, subtract, multiply,divide	12	1	13	1	21	1	3	1
	do fractions	30	3	33	5	54	2	10	3
	do word problems	27	2	31	3	64	3	8	2
	do percents	41	5	32	4	69	4	13	5
Listening	to info on TV or radio	25	2	29	3	65	4	9	4
	in conversation	32	4	15	2	37	2	8	2
	to instructions	30	3	14	1	32	1	5	1
	in a group discussion	21	1	32	4	56	3	8	2
Thinking	able to compare things	32	5	34	5	69	4	14	5
	understand needs and wants	27	2	23	2	41	1	5	1
	consider risks	35	3	23	2	69	4	9	4
	make decisions	21	1	32	4	44	2	7	2
	identify cause and effect	35	3	22	1	58	3	7	2

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