

Literacy is for life.



Movement for Canadian Literacy • FACTSHEET

Literacy and Aboriginal Success

The ideal approach in First Nations literacy programs is a 'two way' system of basic and lifelong education in which Aboriginal language and knowledge play as significant a role as the languages and knowledge of the surrounding society.

Aboriginal Literacy Rates in Canada

Canada's Aboriginal population was not factored into the Canadian figures for the International Adult Literacy Survey conducted in 1994/96. This study revealed that almost 50% of Canadian adults can't work well with words and numbers. **The reality is that Canada's Aboriginal peoples have even lower literacy rates.** This disadvantage is compounded by the inter-connectedness of literacy to poverty, poor health and high unemployment and crime rates.

What can be done?

Aboriginal literacy is a complex issue, involving the need to heal, and to reclaim identity, language, culture, and self-determination. Over the past decade, many Aboriginal organizations have done research and made recommendations about these issues. The following statement of beliefs embodies some common principles about Aboriginal literacy.

We believe in:

- a **learner-centred approach** to literacy skills development which links literacy to real issues in learners' lives. This allows the learner to set learning goals ensuring respect for and empowerment of the learner
- a **community-based approach** in which Aboriginal people identify their own educational needs and develop solutions to the literacy issue within their communities, drawing on some of the traditional strengths and wisdom of Aboriginal communities
- a **holistic approach** to skills development ensuring the individual is respected as a whole person who is part of a family, a community and a Nation
- **program diversity** and a variety of teaching method options reflecting the wide diversity of Aboriginal Nations providing literacy services

- a **culturally based approach** to literacy training that ensures respect for the learner and takes into account prior learning and experiences
- literacy training that incorporates skills development in **Aboriginal languages and traditions**;
- literacy training that considers the need for increased **interactions between Natives and non- Natives on an equal basis**. (Ontario Native Literacy Coalition, 1999)

What has been done?

There are many examples of successful Aboriginal literacy initiatives in action. Here are a few:

- Native literacy groups have developed a variety of unique curriculum materials including: a training model for Aboriginal literacy peer and community tutors; a tutor guide using oral history from local Elders; materials for adults with Fetal Alcohol Syndrome and a strategy for improving the quality of life for disabled Aboriginal people through literacy.
- In a Manitoba prison literacy program, the teacher worked with Aboriginal students to rewrite the “Twelve Steps” in simple language, incorporating Native concepts and images to make it more inspiring and supportive to Aboriginal readers.
- Another program designed special curriculum for learners who wanted to help their children in school. Parents learned how to support their children in doing their homework, and how to prepare themselves for parent-teacher interviews.

Suggested Aboriginal Literacy Resources

There is currently a committee that is developing a national aboriginal literacy umbrella organization. Contact the consultant, Ningwakwe (Rainbow Woman) to inquire about the work of the National Aboriginal Design Committee at tel: 416-250-7428 or email: priscilla.george@sympatico.ca

- ✓ **Aboriginal Literacy Foundation.** c/o Aboriginal Centre, Winnipeg, Manitoba, tel: 302-989-8863, website: www.abcentre.org (look under Tennants)
- ✓ **Alphaplus Centre,** Nancy Cooper, Aboriginal Literacy Field Consultant, tel: 1-800-788-1120, website: www.alphaplus.ca
- ✓ **Gabriel Dumont Institute of Native Studies and Applied Research.** Contact tel: 306-249-9400, fax: 306-244-0252, website: www.gdins.org
- ✓ **National Adult Literacy Database (NALD)** has information and on-line resources about Aboriginal literacy on its website: www.nald.ca
- ✓ **Ningwakwe Learning Press Native Literacy Resources,** tel: 1-888-551-9757 or 519-372-9855, fax: 519-372-1684, e-mail: info@ningwakwe.on.ca or website: www.ningwakwe.on.ca
- ✓ **Ontario Native Literacy Coalition** tel: 1-800-971-2255 or 519-371-5594, fax: 519-371-5598, e-mail: onlc@on.aibn.com, website: www.nald.ca/onlc.htm

- ✓ **The Language of Literacy: A National Resource Directory of Aboriginal Programs** by Beverly Ann Sabourin and Associates, Winnipeg Manitoba, 1998. View it under “Full Text Documents” at www.nald.ca
- ✓ **Reaching the Rainbow: Aboriginal Literacy in Canada**, multimedia kit by the Literacy Department at Parkland Regional College, Yorkton, Saskatchewan. Contact tel: 306-783-6566 or visit www.parklandcollege.sk.ca. Order the kit (\$55) by fax: 306-786-7866.