

Saskatchewan Literacy Network 2009 Literacy Cafés

Volume 2: Central Saskatchewan

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What are literacy practitioners passionate about?
What's working? What would we like to see more of?
Actions steps and key opportunities



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Welcome to the World Café

As a Conversational process, a World Cafe is an innovative yet simple way to host conversations about questions that matter. These conversations link and build on each other as people move between groups, share ideas, and discover new insights into the questions or issues that are most important in their life, work or community. The World Cafe highlights the collective intelligence of any group. This increases people's ability to take action in pursuit of common goals.

As a living network pattern, the World Cafe refers to a living network of conversation that is continually evolving as we explore questions that matter with our family, friends, colleagues, and community. The metaphor of the 'World as Cafe' helps us notice these invisible webs of dialogue and personal relationships that enable us to learn, create shared purpose and shape life-affirming futures together.

The integrative design principles have been created over the years as a guide to intentionally harness the power of conversation for business and social value. When used in combination, they provide useful guidance for anyone seeking creative ways to foster ways to think together and create solutions to act upon.

*"Good things start
with a conversation."*

-Paul Born



*From the World Cafe online (www.theworldcafe.com)

Why a Literacy Café?

*"Literacy is
my passion."*

-café participant

In May 2009, the Saskatchewan Literacy Network held Literacy Cafes in North Battleford and Saskatoon. In January, we held a learner's literacy cafe with adult learners from across the province. We wanted to learn about:

- **Current activities in each region,**
- **What was working well,**
- **The challenges that literacy stakeholders face and observe, and**
- **The opportunities for action and change.**

We also wanted to provide an opportunity for literacy stakeholders to connect and exchange information. While literacy networking groups already exist in some of the communities within central Saskatchewan, the Cafés attracted people who had not previously been connected to these group. We hope to support ongoing literacy networking and collaboration throughout the central region of the province.

Our goals remain the same as in the project's first year, with literacy cafes that were conducted in the south:

- To provide a networking opportunity for literacy stakeholders, and
- To ask for information that will guide our work at the Literacy Network, including our conversations and communication with decision-makers.

While literacy networking groups already exist in some of the communities within central Saskatchewan, the Cafes attracted people who had not previously been connected to these groups. We hope to support ongoing literacy networking and collaboration throughout the central region of the province.

This report summarizes key messages brought forward by participants, and highlights the issues that are clearly key motivators for both the success and the challenges faced by the province's central region.

Two messages were clearly reiterated throughout the cafes:

- The abundant positive, learner-focused experiences that adult learners have benefitted from in the region.
- The keenly felt need for coordinated, collaborative approach to program delivery.

As Literacy Practitioners, what are you passionate about?

- Lifelong learning.
- Understanding culture – mine and those around me
- Working with people with disabilities
- Coaching and mentoring
- Watching others move from struggles into success
- Working with parents and families, children and youth
- Building community
- Travel, writing, reading, music, creativity
- Creating with my hands
- Working for equal access

"We need to educate people on the language of literacy. Literacy is all-encompassing."

-café participant

When it comes to literacy, what is working well in our region?

Family involvement

- Community tours at the library, museum, and fire hall
- Businesses partnerships offering free Internet access
- Programs engaging families in learning together

Learner focused programs

- Increased awareness of the broad definition that encompasses the meaning behind the word 'literacy'
- High schools and colleges focusing on learners' needs
- Learner groups gaining skills such as cooking, numeracy and interpersonal skills

Community engagement

- Volunteer-driven ESL conversation circles
- Free drop-in programs with accepting and non-judgemental environments
- Increased awareness resulting in an increase in volunteers and lowered stigmas
- Schools embracing cultural learning, computer training and nutrition programs

"Once healing happens, people are better able to learn."

-café participant



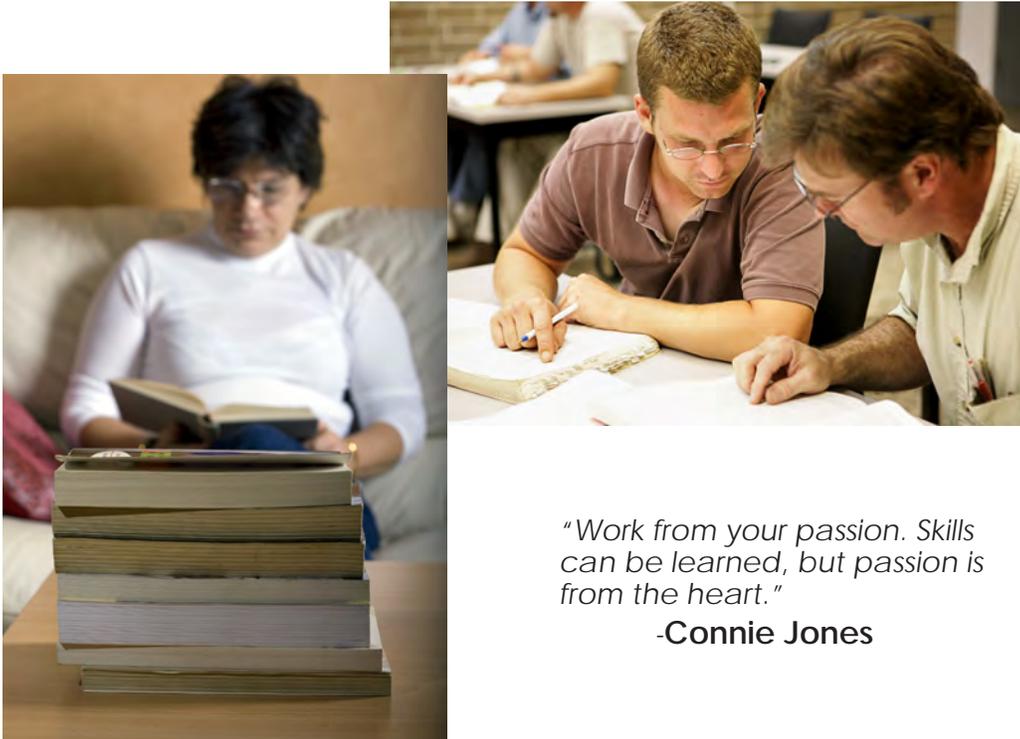
Funding and Administration

- Provincial and regional literacy agencies are keeping literacy in the public eye
- An increase in affordable resources
- Fund availability through government change
- Sustainability success in certain areas

What would we like to see more of?

Funding:

- For meals, snacks, elder honoraria and workshop materials
- For additional free programs
- That is sensitive to the length of time it takes to learn English as an Additional Language
- From funders that address literacy beyond job readiness to include life skills, communication and more
- For the freedom to repeat programs that are proven to be successful



"Work from your passion. Skills can be learned, but passion is from the heart."

-Connie Jones

Cultural Relevance

- More intercultural collaboration and communication, discussing and sharing on the importance of literacy
- Culturally based programs, such as culture camps in schools for parents

Learner engagement

- Using the Saskatchewan Literacy Benchmarks processes
- Focusing on the interests of youth such as hip hop and art, etc.
- Bringing speakers to learners based on their interests, such as nutrition and positive parenting
- Encouraging learner support groups, which are so important in building confidence

Community Involvement

- Open communication between parents and educators
- A drop-in community centre serving many age groups
- Awareness of the importance of involvement in community, and how taking ownership can make positive changes
- More partnering between organizations to decrease competition for program dollars.

"Look to successful business models who typically develop strategies for success. These can be models for collaboration and efficiency, learning from each other, and decreasing the stereotypes."

-café participant



Program coordination

- Hire people who are passionate about literacy
- Have the capacity for more boots on the ground, including a full time regional literacy coordinator.
- Greater learner access to literacy activities on a continuous basis
- Incorporating life skills within literacy programs
- More networking opportunities

What steps would you like to take in the coming year?

Exchange information

- Get together several times per year in a way that is accessible to smaller areas where travel is required.
- Get involved in more meetings that have to do with literacy
- Develop teacher exchange programs
- Identify the interested parties on all sides of literacy, including practitioners, agencies and learners
- Develop a literacy steering committee who would keep their fingers on the pulse of literacy community as a whole
- Share best practices and grassroots initiatives with one another
- Invite funders to networking opportunities with NGO/CBOs

Connect with government

- Promote success stories and testimonials within structured reporting
- Create awareness in government that literacy is a means of developing the workforce
- Invite officials to literacy events
- Invite funder collatoration by sharing the need and the difficulties with funding processes

"Literacy needs to be the initiative, not the by product. Employment should not be the only goal for funding."

-café participant

How can we increase collaboration in our region?



Communicate

- Facilitate a regional literacy cafe each year
- Find out where the gaps are, and advocate funding to fill those gaps.
- Restart the North Battleford Literacy Group meetings.
- Share information with other organizations about upcoming events and funding sources
- Connect with agencies outside the literacy field such as those in health care, education and justice
- Practitioners involved in research-in-practice to demonstrate positive outcomes of learner-directed learning.
- Share regional information with the Saskatchewan Literacy Network for their website

Awareness

- Define collaboration and educate people early
- Invite media to highlight successful partnerships locally

Community Development

- Develop mentorship opportunities for learners, such as that provided by the Saskatoon Business Mentorship Institute.
- Create a representative incubator group that could include housing, social services, information sharing through technology.
- Build on the connections made at the literacy cafe and continue to share ideas

Linking Business

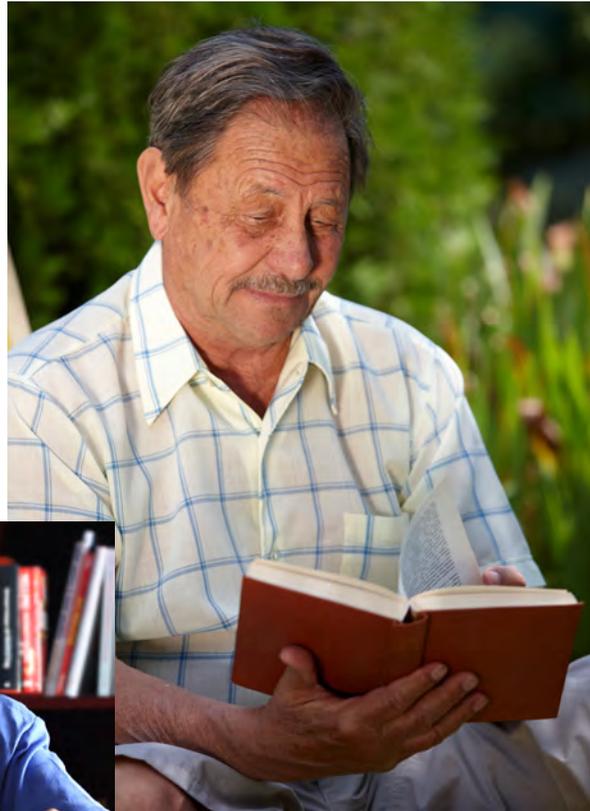
- Introduce the concepts of workplace, family and computer literacy to businesses
- Develop key partnerships within the city, which could become corporate sponsorships
- Encourage employers to embrace the concept of on-job-learning, such as noon hour language classes
- Forge connections between nearby communities.
- Volunteer/donate such things as building use and supplies—engage all the way up and down the chain.

“We must find ways to partner with non-traditional literacy stakeholders to support volunteer professional development opportunities.”

-café participant

"The ripple effect of past programs is still providing benefit to our community."

-café participant



Reflection: what participants had to say about the process

- *"I didn't realize there was so much good happening in our community. It's great to see!"*
- *"I am taking away knowledge of what is available."*
- *"Partnership and collaboration can make things happen."*
- *"This is such an important networking opportunity for those involved in various literacy activities. We need higher attendance at these events."*
- *"This is a great way to pick up ideas from others and take back to our communities – it enhances opportunities."*
- *"Building trust and honesty is at the heart of the issue."*

- *“Process is so important to determine both sides’ needs to best meet the needs of the end user.”*
- *“Intentionality when supporting learners can have a real impact. This is easiest through learner support groups.”*
- *“Collaboration happened organically today. Through conversation, we discovered a new, easy opportunity to work together.”*
- *“It’s so refreshing to be with people who are here for a common goal.”*
- *“Great opportunity to get out of our cocoon and hear ideas I can take back. I’m going to share many of these ideas with my staff!”*





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