



Time to Read and Estevan Area Literacy Group: results from two collaborative approaches to literacy

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Meeting: 85. Literacy and Reading in co-operation with the Public Libraries and Library Services to Multicultural Populations
Simultaneous Interpretation: Not available

WORLD LIBRARY AND INFORMATION CONGRESS: 74TH IFLA GENERAL CONFERENCE AND COUNCIL

10-14 August 2008, Québec, Canada
<http://www.ifla.org/iv/ifla74/index.htm>

Abstract:

This paper will discuss two literacy projects involving First Nations, public libraries and schools in the province of Saskatchewan, Canada. Time to Read is a partnership approach to literacy development for students, teachers, parents, and the general public in rural public library branches and schools in the shared geography of a Southeast Regional Library and Prairie Valley School division. The project is funded by a \$80,000 Partnerships for Community Learning Resources Grant through Saskatchewan Provincial Library. See <http://www.pvsd.ca/timetoread/>

Estevan Area Literacy Group(EALG) is a community development partnership of business, First Nations people, public libraries, early childhood educators, a day care, schools, and employment and immigration government agencies. Its goals are literacy promotion and improvement at Ocean Man First Nation, English as a Second Language training among immigrant workers, early childhood literacy, and workplace literacy. EALG is funded by the partners and a \$59,300 grant from SaskSmart. See <http://cap.estevan.sk.ca/literacy> .

Introduction:

In recent years, Canada has been ranked by the United Nations as the best place in the world in which to live, and the province of Saskatchewan the best place in Canada. Recent economic developments involving resource extraction such as oil, coal, potash, uranium and a resurgent agricultural economy have made Saskatchewan's the fastest growing economy in Canada. These factors have resulted in a very strong demand for skilled labour, rapidly increasing immigration, and urgent attention to labour force skill development including literacy generally and English as a Second Language (ESL) training, in particular.

Southeast Saskatchewan is rich in resources and is undergoing intense economic development. Estevan Area Literacy Group (EALG) and the Time to Read Project are two collaborative initiatives which are attempting to address aboriginal, workplace and family literacy issues.

This paper will present the geography, goals, activities, outcomes, and references relating to these two initiatives.

Time to Read Project:

The Partnerships for Community Learning Resources Grant, which funds the Time to Read project, has this vision and these goals:

“The vision for Saskatchewan Learning is for cooperation and collaboration across all of the learning sector partners to improve access to resources and enhance opportunities for literacy and lifelong learning. To support this vision, Saskatchewan Learning has created a fund in the amount of \$300,000 to which a school division and a public library system may jointly apply for project funding. The program will be administered by representatives from the following branches within Saskatchewan Learning: Provincial Library; Curriculum and E-Learning; First Nations and Métis Education; and the Regional Directors of Education.”

- Advance the goals and objectives of the Saskatchewan Learning with particular emphasis on programs, services and collections that support literacy, lifelong learning, resource-based learning and the needs of Aboriginal people.
- Encourage and stimulate partnerships and collaborative planning between school divisions and public library systems.
- Extend the capacity of learning partners by stimulating resource-sharing.
- Encourage public library systems and school divisions to develop models of collaboration that will have implications for future local cooperative initiatives.
- Develop library collections programs and/or services that support student learning.
- Represent a new or innovative approach to collaboration or a significant extension of a current project.
- Have direct benefit for students in the Pre-K to Grade 12 provincial school system in Saskatchewan.
- Provide funding to initiate programs than could be sustained by the partners upon completion of the funded project.
- Be inclusive and incorporate, where possible, partnerships with First Nations, library systems and school divisions.

The Time to Read program aims at strengthening and changing cultures in the school, home, and community to support and engage students in reading. While one outcome will be to encourage and support partnerships between school libraries and regional libraries branch, the focus is on improved independent reading for all students.

The geography of the project is the overlapping jurisdiction of Southeast Regional Library and Prairie Valley School Division. The regional library has over 50 service

points in a service area of over 18,000 square miles. Prairie Valley School Division has 38 schools. There are 21 public library service points in the School Division. Not every community in the shared service area has both a library and a school, or either.

Goals of the Time to Read project included enhanced student reading; involvement of teachers, students, parents, school and public librarians in a collaborative literacy effort; and the development of a relationship involving the school division and the regional library. The first step in pursuing these goals was to hire a project coordinator, and a fully-qualified teacher was selected to lead the project.

The four components of the program provided a framework to focus activities and messages that will build a positive culture for reading. They are:

- Club – “Join the world of readers” (belonging, inclusion)
- Challenge – “Read to succeed” (mastery, strategies)
- Choice – “I Love Reading” (independence)
- Community – “Reading Connects.” (generosity, sharing)

One of the public library activities in the project was hosting sessions for parents about what activities they could do at home to involve their children in reading. Another activity involved public librarians, who, for the first time, met school librarians working in their community to develop a shared understanding of literacy and set goals for joint activities. A third component for public libraries was the hosting of author readings. Finally, library staff visited several schools to demonstrate online magazine resources and other functions of the regional e-library services such as the catalogue, and placing requests for library materials from branches within the region, in Saskatchewan or from other libraries in Canada. During these visits every student in the school was issued a library card, which allows home, school, and other remote access to e-library services.

Activities in schools included motivational reading activities, book rewards, author readings. An insert was put in report cards which went home to parents, encouraging parents to:

“encourage your child, model reading behaviours, involve them in reading experiences, go to the library together, provide opportunities for them to read regularly and frequently.

- read together, read out-loud, share stories
- share newspaper and magazine articles
- use reading for recipes, web information, how-to instructions”

Two surveys were done. During October 2007, an online survey for school and public librarians was conducted by the TIME to READ program to assess needs regarding program activities and events. Responses from 19 branch librarians and 32 teacher-librarians indicated both groups were involved in a wide variety of reading promotion activities, but joint programs and service sharing were rare. Program coordinators explained the survey offers insights into opportunities for building a more collaborative environment within communities and also indicates areas with a need for improved emphasis. In addition to collecting this benchmark data, a post-program survey was

done between May 15, 2008, and June 7, 2008. Results of the latter survey will be available for presentation at IFLA.

The timelines for the project were:

October 31, 2007 – Closing of Pre-Program Survey

November 13, 2007 & 15, 2007 – Training session for teacher-librarians and branch librarians

November 22-23, 2007 – Author Tour (Canadian Children's Book Centre Book Week)

November 19-29, 2007 – program launch in each community (Locally determined)

Early December – Poster and Product Launch

December 5, 2007 – first Newsletter

December to April – Author visits

December 14, 2007 – Closing of Book Mark Contest

January 18, 2008 – second Newsletter

January 27, 2008 – FAMILY LITERACY DAY

February, 2008 – Aboriginal Storytelling Week

March 7, 2008 – third Newsletter

April 11, 2008 – Close of Poster Contest

May 2, 2008 – fourth Newsletter

May, 2008 - Million Minute Challenge Week – Division-wide

May, 2008 – celebrations and wrap-ups

May 15, 2008 - June 1 – Post-program Survey

June 13, 2008 – final Newsletter

Other elements of the project were a media kit, poster, an email newsgroup, a newsletter, website, brochures, log books, post cards, stickers, bibliography, website links, pennants, and ribbons. Special events included a launch, book mark contest, poster launch, school BINGO contest, and a project-wide celebration at the end of the project period.

This is the form related to the school BINGO contest:

R	E	A	D	S
Read a picture book or novel .	Read an article from "Newspaper" together.	Read a Magazine	Share a Story with a buddy.	Read a Poem or Rhyme
Scan a Telephone book (Find names and phone number for people or businesses)	Read the words to a song	Read the T.V. Guide and plan time for the family to watch together	Read a Comic Strip	Play a board game together.
Find sites on the internet and read facts about your favorite topic.	Read a Recipe, maybe even cook something.		Visit a Museum, Art Gallery, Science Centre, etc.	Find and read picture signs and symbols. (i.e. bathroom signs, stores, emoticons)
Listen to a story or book on cassette or CD.	Do a crossword or Sudoku puzzle.	READ store signs outside and aisle signs inside.	Read or write a card/note or message.	Read facts on FOOD boxes or containers.
Read FLYERS and make a shopping or grocery list.	Read a Joke or Riddle Book	Read Street Addresses or community signs	Send a Letter or Post Card or an email message.	Make poster or an ad for reading with your family

Testimonials from the project include:

“We made a book about our family with pictures and stories about each member of our family.”

-Edenwold parent

“On Sunday January 27, 2008 our family spent part of the afternoon in the Chapters bookstore in Regina looking around at all the great books they have. The goal was for our two girls and mom to pick out a new book.”

-PVSD parent

“We read about sharks on-line from National geographic. We also checked out some animals videos.”

- Pense parent

“Our 7 year old read a night-time story to our 4 year old.”

-Cupar parent

“We made a newspaper sports section on a "tribute to rider player/coach Kent Austin.””

-Edenwold parent

“We looked up the lyrics for the song, “Forever in Blue Jeans” by Neil Diamond and then wrote the song title, and lyrics on the front and back legs of a pair of mom’s blue jeans. There are four boys in our family and so each of us had a front or back of a leg to write on and decorate.”

-Lumsden parent

“We downloaded crosswords and board games from the ABC literacy site.”

-PVSD parent

“We went to the public library and signed up for library cards. We enjoyed browsing and each of us took home books to read.”

-Pense parent

A meaningful quote relating to the Time to Read project is this statement from David Bouchard, a Métis and one of Canada's most popular children's authors, and who, until the age of 27, had not read a book!

“When children and less literate adults read for pleasure, even fifteen minutes a day in school, their reading comprehension, written style, vocabulary, speaking, and control of grammar improve, and they find academic texts easier to use.: Citing numerous and varied studies, Stephen Krashen (The Power of Reading) demonstrates that a voluntary reading program is a more powerful means of developing readers than direct instruction with exercises and drills. “

-David Bouchard The Gift of Reading

In my view, a key outcome of this project is what I call the habits of collaboration. Through the project, partnerships were developed between school and public librarians, many of whom had met each other for the first time as a result of this initiative. Parents and children were given very specific opportunities to spend time together to consciously improve their literacy skills and enjoy reading and being with one another. Siblings learned to share these activities together without need of parental leadership. Teachers, students, and parents worked with librarians to make things happen. The regional library and the school division headquarters staff developed new relationships. All of these things have developed the capacity of the communities involved to strengthen literacy skills in a way which is meaningful to them, and all of this grass roots activity has occurred in a well-designed, structured framework. And all of this was fostered and supported financially by provincial government.

Another key outcome, of course, is the increase in activity surrounding reading and literacy. Finally, and most importantly, the frequency of reading and the amount of reading done by everyone increased!

Estevan Area Literacy Group:

In the community of Estevan there are about 10,000 residents. At the time of writing, there were about 600 jobs available in Estevan and area. The employment situation has resulted in workers coming to the area from all over the world. A key aspect of their successful participation in the Canadian society and economy is proficiency in the English language. A consequence of these factors is that English as a Second Language (ESL) training has become urgently important for workers, their spouses, and their children.

In addition, Saskatchewan's attainment of literacy skill level three, while better than that of Canada as a whole, still results in over 200,000 citizens whose abilities are below that required to participate fully in the economy. Workplace literacy is an issue.

Saskatchewan has a high proportion of Aboriginal people among its population. The Aboriginal community has identified literacy as a key concern, especially given the large number of youth among the First Nations, and their need to provide leadership for the development of the province today, and in the future.

To address these needs Estevan Area Literacy Group was formed. Estevan Area Literacy Group (EALG) is a community development partnership of business, First Nations people, public libraries, early childhood educators, a day care, schools, and employment and immigration government agencies. Its goals are literacy promotion and improvement at Ocean Man First Nation, English as a Second Language training among immigrant workers, early childhood literacy, and workplace literacy. EALG is funded by the partners and a \$59,300 grant from SaskSmart.

The geography served by the group is in the immediate vicinity of the city of Estevan, and Ocean Man First Nation, a small aboriginal community of about 150 Nakota speakers located 75 kilometres north of Estevan.

An important first step in the development of Estevan Area Literacy Group was cultivation of partners for the project. This was done by library staff. Once funding was received, a Literacy Coordinator was hired. The Coordinator is a qualified teacher and has Aboriginal ancestry.

The five main areas of activity include Aboriginal literacy, early childhood literacy, family literacy, workplace literacy, and English as a Second Language or ESL training.

At Ocean Man First Nation a building which was previously the Fire Hall was transformed into a library. Regional Library staff helped furnish, stock, and train staff for this library. This is the first ever library service for the community. Inside the library preschool children attend classes, Internet and computing facilities are available, books and videos can be borrowed, and a hired librarian is on hand to help.

Ocean Man has obtained funding to conduct a five-month programme called “Embracing the knowledge of our elders through literacy”. Their language, Nakota (Assiniboine), is almost extinct in their community. One of the goals of this project is to teach youth the language, and through that effort, retain Nakota as a living tongue. Activities used to achieve this include serving traditional food while elders engage in oral storytelling and reading books with First Nation content. A craft will be included in the transfer of knowledge. Gloria Shepherd, the Ocean Man Band Councillor responsible for Education, Training, Language, Economic Development, and Recreation, has spearheaded the effort to create the library and to retain Nakota as a working language.

Other activities at Ocean Man include visits by a professional librarian from Southeast Regional Library to read to children, talk to teachers, help develop the library, and promote career development among youth. The regional library is also participating with 13 other First Nations to develop library service and literacy.

Estevan Area Literacy Group is partnering with Southeast Community Settlement Committee (SCSC) to address broader settlement issues, while EALG focuses on English as a Second Language training. This training is accomplished through the services of a literacy attendant hired by Southeast Regional College. The attendant matches learners with volunteer tutors. Employers also coordinate this training in unison, and independently.

The Pan-Canadian Literacy Forum held in April of 2008 underscored the critical timeframe for early childhood literacy to be from birth to the age of four. EALG is increasing early childhood literacy awareness in the community through visits to day cares, schools, and events like the Literacy Festival, which attracted 750 visitors of all ages, and about 18 exhibitors.

EALG has also been keen to raise awareness of the need for greater workplace literacy. Many Canadians who are not recent immigrants need to improve their literacy levels in order to secure their wellbeing, employment prospects, and participate fully in our democratic society. Regular media presence has helped the group achieve this goal.

Another concern has been literacy skills among men and boys. In order to address this issue the public library, which is a partner in EALG, commenced a programme called The Man in the Moon. In this programme men and boys enjoy reading, crafts, manly food, at the public library. It is inspired by a programme by the same name at Vancouver Public Library.

In the end, literacy of all types is well served by an emphasis on family literacy. This provides a critical social context for being word wise, which in the end, leads directly to being world wise. Events like EALG's Literacy Festival attracted families by having a range of events which were suitable for young children such as the alphabet game, free leisure centre swimming passes for children of all ages, exhibitor information for parents about literacy products and services, and games such as Are you Smarter than a Fifth Grader, in which the Mayor had an opportunity to amuse the citizens with his knowledge and skills!

Summary:

Both EALG and the Time to Read project address the needs for a literate population in Saskatchewan's booming economy. Both projects cultivate perhaps the most important outcome, the habits of collaboration. Through these habits communities develop the capacity to identify and address any need with the resources of a cluster of stakeholders committed to making the necessary improvements in society.

The results of these efforts have been an increased awareness of literacy, more frequent reading and literacy-related behaviours, and a broadening of partnerships supporting the goals. Some of these partnerships are quite natural, yet would not have developed without the impetus of the projects described in this report.

Sources:

- <http://www.pvsd.ca/timetoread/>
- <http://cap.estevan.sk.ca/literacy/>
- Judy Nicholson, Prairie Valley School Division judynic@sasktel.net
- Pam Gunnlaugson, Estevan Area Literacy Group EALGlitcoordinator@live.ca
- Greg Salmers, Librarian gsalmers@southeast.lib.sk.ca
<http://cap.estevan.sk.ca/biog.html>

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GCS/gs May, 2008.