

First Nations Literacy Research

by Ethel Blake

The mandate of Yukon Learn is to promote literacy in the Yukon by developing and providing programs, by increasing public awareness, and by advocating for those in need of services.

Overall, the definition of literacy varies according to the immediate needs within each First Nations community. In general, literacy to the First Nations means gaining the skills to read, write, and comprehend written and oral information. "It means power—once you've got these skills, you have the power to move on in life, personally and as a community" (Gordon Read and Eleanor Millard). It is the development of these skills that will enable First

Nations to begin to identify their needs and take an active role in planning programs that would meet the educational needs of their people.

The Council for Yukon Indians was looked upon as playing a supportive role to the communities, to fulfill its mandate to ensure that literacy becomes a priority in First Nations communities.

The main objective of this project is to identify and determine an action plan for

Yukon Learn to proceed with. The action plan identifies recommendations that Yukon Learn could implement in collaboration with the First Nations communities and other organizations mentioned.

The approach is to support all actions that will promote and provide for community-based, community controlled literacy programming.

Public Awareness: It is recommended, therefore, that Yukon Learn give presentations, at the request of First Nations communities, on innovative ways of using resources effectively, how to plan effective literacy programs, and how to prepare proposals to access funding for literacy programs.

Recruitment: It is recommended that Yukon Learn, through membership drives and board elections, encourage members from First Nations communities outside Whitehorse, Yukon Indian Women's Association, Yukon College, and the private sector to become members of Yukon Learn.

Advocacy: It is recommended that Yukon Learn promote its philosophy to First Nations that instruction is learner-directed and integrated with the personal goals of the learner; develop a Yukon approach to deliver literacy programs that has First Nations content and uses Elders as resource people; encourage First Nations communities to take ownership of and responsibility for literacy programs in their communities and become accountable to their residents for the quantity and quality of these programs; advocate for families' involvement in literacy through the promotion of activities such as parent/child reading circles and family homework activities with the assistance of a tutor.

The requests made by the communities through the consultation process formed the basis of the stated recommendations. The communities view Yukon Learn as an agency that can bring the issue of literacy to the forefront and assist in alleviating problems that stem from low literacy skills. Furthermore, the communities recognize that a collaborative approach is needed since they cannot do this on their own. As a result, partnerships are looked at in a positive way.

Working together, First Nations leadership and supporting agencies can better address literacy needs throughout the Yukon.

Excerpted from the First Nations Literacy Research (based on the 1993 report on Land Claims and Implications for Literacy Programming) written by Ethel Blake for Yukon Literacy Council (now called Yukon Learn), May 1994. Reprinted with permission.

No Chicken Dinner

Sometimes bears get confused (kon-fewzd). Take the black bear who walked into our yard one day.

This fine fluffy black bear was just walking along. He sniffed the air as he went down the power line right of way.

Now we did not exactly see him sniff the air, but I am sure he did just that.

The bear followed his nose. He didn't really (ree-lee) look where he was or what was around him.

He was dreaming of tender chickens or rabbits and raspberries for dessert (deez-urt). So he walked into our yard.

Well, along the yard limped (limpt) an old black Lab. He didn't really feel too well. He didn't really see anything.

He wanted to lie in the hot sun and scratch (skcratch). He wanted to sleep.

Suddenly, both dog and bear saw each other (aw-thur). They looked stunned. The bear jumped.

He swung his head around and saw a red pickup, buildings (bild-ings) and an angry old dog.

The bear began to run. First he ran towards the house (haws), then he ran towards the bush.

But the dog was between him and the bush. That old dog was making a lot of noise (noiz).

The bear was scared and ran down the hill and along the lake. Chicken dinner was no longer on his mind.

Written by Liesel Briggs for Project Wordpower. This "Freedom to Read" column originally appeared in *The Yukon News*, Friday, October 1, 1993. Reprinted with permission.