

LITERACY ACCESS PROJECT: LIFELONG LEARNING COLLECTIONS

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The Literacy Access Project represents the second phase of a larger initiative undertaken by The Centre for Literacy to formally assess and adjust its local mandate. The ultimate goal of this strategic effort was to formulate a long-term sustainability plan in the context of important changes that have been taking place in the English community in Quebec in recent years. These changes include a shrinking population base, cuts in provincial and federal funding, new responsibilities for school boards, and the recent creation of community learning centres in various regions of the province.

On the basis of a 2006 Community Consultation and building on the 2007 Summer Institute on Libraries and Literacy, The Centre determined that it needed to develop more solid and lasting links between libraries and literacy groups that support English populations.

Introduction

The 2006 Community Consultation (a previous IFPCA project) indicated clearly that literacy providers, community organizations and libraries are interested in working together on literacy issues. They are also eager to partner with The Centre in promoting literacy. This and the fact that English-language libraries in Quebec have not generally been involved in literacy initiatives strongly suggested that The Centre for Literacy could play an important role in facilitating constructive collaborative efforts between these various organizations in support of literacy among the English-speaking population of Quebec.

The Literacy Access Project was designed to make literacy resources available to the English population, both in and outside of Montreal. Literacy resources (books, the services of literacy providers) would be tailored to the needs of participating communities and promoted through the collaboration of The Centre for Literacy and local partners. Partnerships would bring together parties committed to share knowledge, expertise and resources.

In collaboration with partners, a name was selected for the satellite libraries: the Lifelong Learning Collection. A logic model was created for the project by an external evaluator (Figure 1). The logic model identified collection and partnership goals and served as the basis for a preliminary evaluation of the project.

Partnerships

The Community Consultation led to discussions between The Centre for Literacy and respondents who expressed a particular interest in collaborating with The Centre on a satellite library project. Three possible sites for housing small literacy collections were identified at the outset of the project:

- The Atwater Library and Computer Centre (Montreal)
- The Eaton Valley Community Learning Centre (based at the Pope Memorial Elementary School, in association with the New Horizons Adult Education, in Bury, the Eastern Townships)
- The Gaspé Community Learning Centre (based at the Gaspé Polyvalent, English Section, in association with Gaspé and Belle Anse Elementary Schools)

Continued outreach by The Centre led to the later addition of a fourth site and partnership:

- The Eleanor London Côte Saint-Luc Public Library (Montreal)

Each partnership involved the participation, to varying degrees, of local literacy organizations — *RECLAIM Literacy Council* in Montreal, *Literacy in Action* in Bury and the *Gaspésie Literacy Council* in Gaspé.

Libraries: The partnerships forged with local libraries through the Literacy Access Project work to serve the literacy needs of the English-speaking community. They also help promote the library setting as one inviting to all members of the community, including those who might be hesitant to seek help from literacy organizations because of the stigma attached to “illiteracy”, as well as new or non-traditional readers.

Community Centres: The Centre for Literacy partnered with two of fifteen new Quebec community learning centres (CLCs) that were created last year to serve as “hubs for English-language education and community development” (supported by the Ministry of Education, Leisure and Sports). The CLCs’ mandate to promote lifelong learning and success among youth, adults and seniors, community development, and the building of local partnerships made these centres obvious venues for regional satellite literacy collections.

Needs Assessments

A Lifelong Learning Collection for each of the four partner sites was developed on the basis of community needs assessments conducted by The Centre for Literacy, in consultation with its partners. The goal of the exercise was to determine:

- Which group/s should form the target audience of the Lifelong Learning Collection (youth, young adults, seniors, immigrants, etc...)
- What reading level/s would be most appropriate for the target audience
- What types of books would most appeal to the target audience (practical, educational, work-related, fiction, non-fiction, subjects, etc...)

The needs assessments provided valuable information on the specific literacy needs of these communities. They also helped publicize and promote the Lifelong Learning Collections among local organizations and their clientele, and strengthened the partnerships.

RECLAIM Literacy Council was so enthusiastic about the project that it offered to formally join the partnership with the Atwater library, incorporate the use of the library and the collection in its tutoring activities, and support the other collections in the project. RECLAIM donated literacy books to several of the collections, and provided free sensitivity training to the staff and volunteers of both the Atwater and Côte Saint-Luc Libraries.

Collections

The results of the community needs assessments varied somewhat from site to site, owing to differences in the demographic profile of each community, local community involvement, as well as the specific objectives of the partners. Table I shows the different groups targeted, as well as the general characteristics of the Lifelong Learning Collections that were constructed for each target audience. Books were selected at an overall intermediate level, though there were also some books for beginner and advanced readers.

Table 1. Description of the Lifelong Learning Collections at the four partner sites.		
Partner/Site	Target Audience	Types of Books Selected for the Lifelong Learning Collection
<i>Atwater Library</i> (Montreal)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adult Learners with RECLAIM • Immigrants/ESL students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Mostly easy readers/novels (fiction)</i> • Some non-fiction books: on parenting, health and wellness, learning, women’s issues, every-day challenges, as well as biographies • <i>Collection:</i> 30 new books (The Centre for Literacy) and 30 used books (RECLAIM Literacy Council)
<i>Eleanor London Côte Saint-Luc Library</i> (Montreal)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Immigrants • Seniors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Balanced mix of non-fiction materials and easy readers/novels:</i> ESL materials and Canadiana, as well as biographies, books on parenting, health and wellness, women’s issues, every-day challenges and the law + short, easy novels by popular authors, as well as abridged classics • Some <i>French</i> fiction (easy readers/novels) • <i>Collection:</i> 48 new books (The Centre for Literacy), 53 new books (Côte Saint-Luc Library) and 6 used books (RECLAIM Literacy Council)
<i>Eaton Valley CLC</i> (Bury)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New or non-habitual adult readers, including learners at an Adult Education Centre 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Mostly non-fiction:</i> books on parenting, health and wellness, women’s issues, every-day challenges and the law, as well as biographies, history/culture, sports, automobiles and crafts • Some easy readers/novels • <i>Collection:</i> 74 new books (The Centre for Literacy)
<i>Gaspé CLC</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New or non-habitual adult readers, including learners 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Mostly non-fiction:</i> books on parenting, health and wellness, women’s issues, seniors, every-day challenges and the law, as well as biographies, history, aboriginal culture, sports, cars, crafts • Some easy readers/novels • <i>Collection:</i> 77 new books (The Centre for Literacy), 36 used books (RECLAIM Literacy Council); ~40-50 children’s books (Quebec Home and School Federation) added to attract families

Evaluation

An external evaluator evaluated the collections and the partnerships set up in this pilot project. Along with The Centre and the various partners, initial conference calls with the evaluator helped to determine the expected outcomes and measures. The framework and evaluation outcomes were built on the following four questions:

1. Are the people we are targeting (new adult readers and adult learners) using the collection?
2. Are the materials we have included in the collection appropriate, i.e. meet the needs of users?
3. Are we getting the word out to the community, i.e. effective outreach?
4. How effective is our partnership?

Because of a late start-date for the Côte Saint-Luc Library collection (the week of November 17th), this collection was not included in the evaluation process. The timeline for evaluation was very short (mid-October to mid-December), and therefore inconclusive in terms of assessing collection usage and impact. The partners have agreed to continue monitoring the implementation and use of the collection for one full year. Follow-up in mid-2008 will assess progress, and begin to reflect on future directions for the project after September 2008.

Future Growth

Strategies discussed in Table 2 will be implemented to better market the collections in their respective communities, and a second self-evaluation will occur in June (CLCs) and September-October (libraries) of 2008. If borrowing statistics and community interest in the collections are demonstrated, efforts will be made with each of the partners to maintain and/or grow the collections. If borrowing at a specific site is low but it is determined that a need for the collection materials still exists, then another venue or partnership in the same community may be sought, i.e. a community or adult education centre where the collection might have greater visibility among target readers.

Of note are measures already taken at a couple of the sites to expand their Lifelong Learning Collections. The Eleanor London Côte Saint-Luc Public Library has identified a growing number of immigrants at the fringes of Côte Saint-Luc, and has purchased numerous ESL-appropriate materials for its collection. At the Gaspé CLC, about 40-50 children's books have been donated by the Quebec Home and School Federation to attract parents and children to the library-space where the Lifelong Learning Collection is housed. There is also the potential to include health-resource books from another community organization.

Conclusion

There was great enthusiasm for the literacy access project, especially in areas which lack English reading materials. Experience establishing the partnerships and implementing the collections has resulted in a viable model for creating targeted satellite libraries. If ongoing evaluation of the Lifelong Learning Collections shows real community interest, this model may be used or adapted to further circulate The Centre for Literacy's extensive resource collection to remote sites, for short- or long-term usage.

Figure 1. Logic Model for the Literacy Access Project

