



Critical Literacies- shifting the conversation



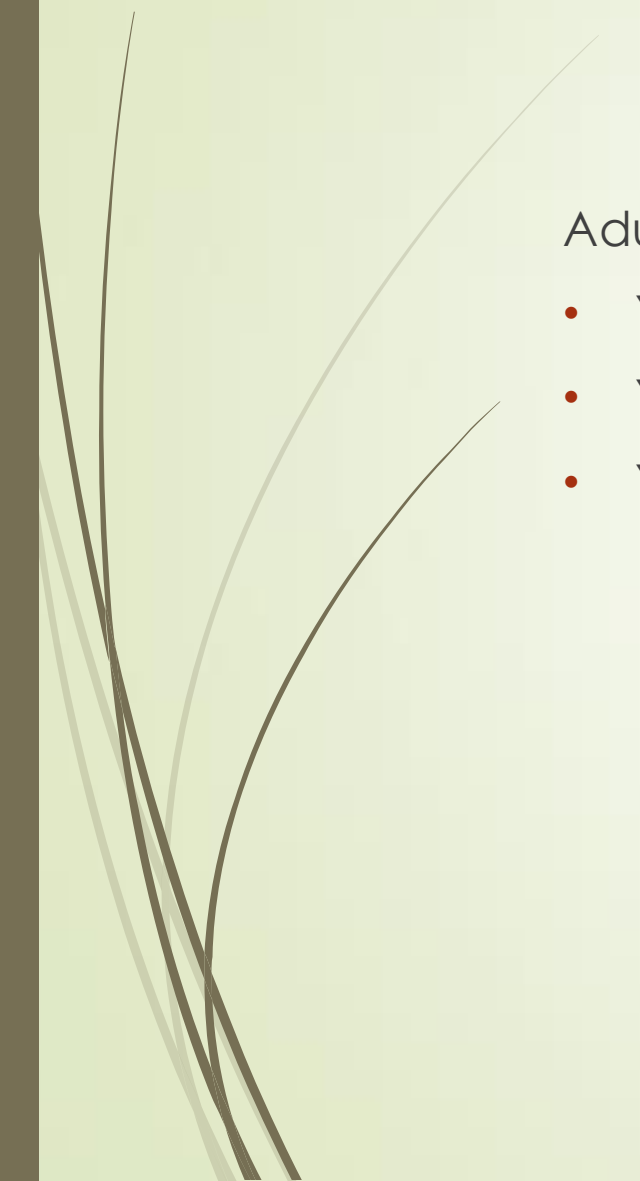
Humane Hopeful Radical

- Ralph St. Clair
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Humane Hopeful Radical

Adult literacy education says:

- You matter
 - Your words matter
 - Your lives matter
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Who knows what learner-centred education really means

Dr. Audrey Gardner

“Listening for hope with humility” that we bring our knowledge to the ‘Dialogical relationship’ of our work with learners and
“find very practical ways for our knowledge to be useful”

“Literacy teaching begins with a critical examination of society and of the participants relationship to it” (David Barton, 1994)



So, what do I mean by my title?

- That it is time to rethink literacy.
 - That there is a 'criticalness' about literacy that we need to pay attention to.
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So, what do I mean by my title?



Literacy has become decontextualized.

In the beginning (again to Friere) literacy was a tool to address poverty, oppression and inequality.

The two strands worked together with a goal to address issues of access and power.

Overtime, and for many reasons, literacy was pulled over to the side of Formal education. A very uncomfortable fit.

Again another shift and literacy moves over to be aligned with Essential Skills- focus on employment and workforce.

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- Literacy is, itself, a defining characteristic of social class. Poor literacy skills can, and do, exclude people from the dominant social groups and opportunities in a society.



Decoda Literacy and Poverty Fact Sheet

“There is a connection between well-being and potential literacy development as adults who earn less participate less in activities that support the development of literacy abilities, and have fewer opportunities to participate in job training and education”




So, what do I mean by my title?

“...it is hard to identify any other single issue that can have such a large payoff to individuals, the economy and society.”

Craig Alexander, VP&DCE TD Bank Financial Group


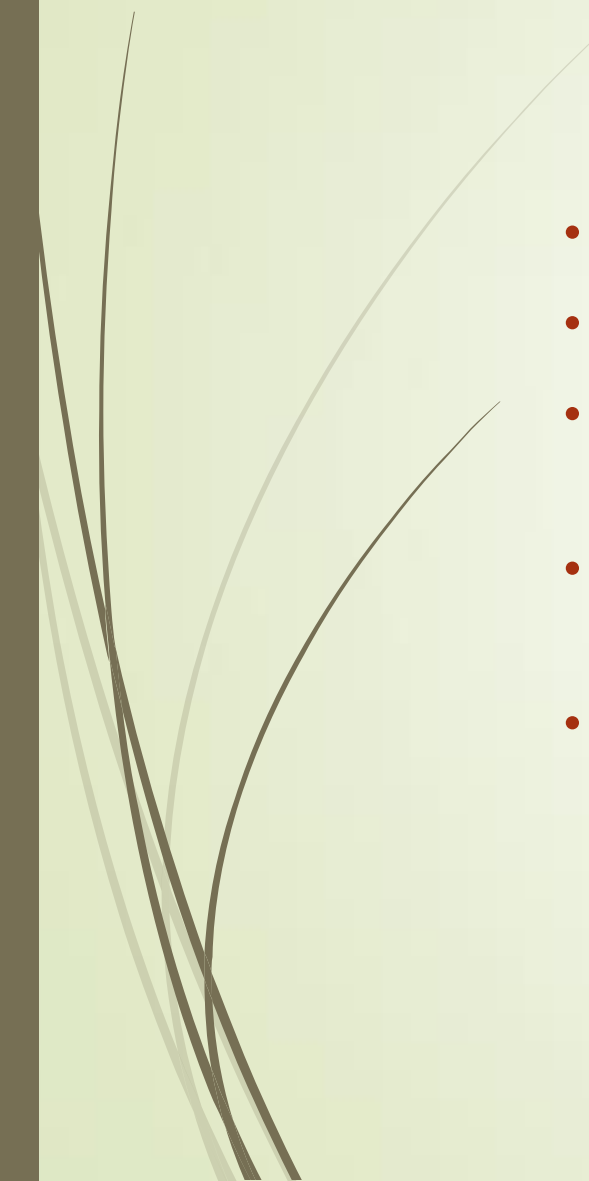
In a spring Frontier College webinar Craig Alexander also said that after all these years of talking about literacy it is still difficult to make a case that people understand....because literacy is an issue that needs to be discussed in CONTEXT with poverty, participation and equality.


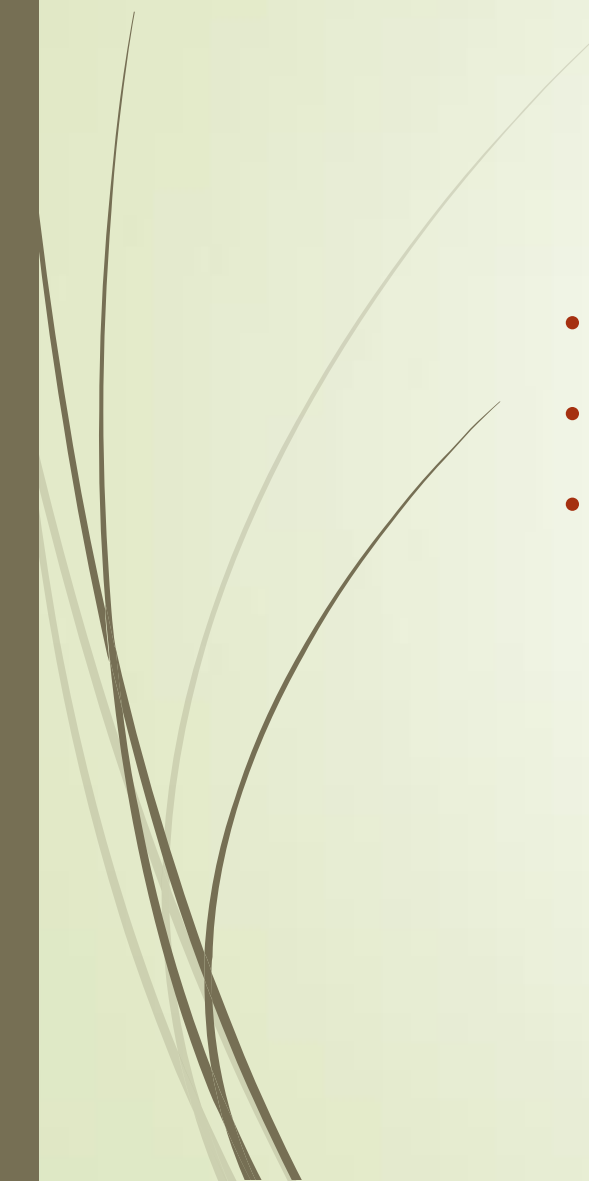



Only a small % (<10%) of adults enroll in literacy or upgrading programs.

The main barriers are socio-economic-circumstantial factors:

- Transportation
- Childcare or support for other vulnerable family members
- Long working hours, disruptive working schedules (shiftwork)
- Family needs
- Poor health
- And?

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- Impact of violence on learning, across the life span
 - Few positive previous learning experiences to draw on
 - Undiagnosed learning disabilities can make us less willing to engage in potentially difficult learning experiences again
 - Need other supports in place to have the time and energy to engage in learning
 - Time commitment to courses/programs

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- Difficulty finding learning programs that can fit their needs
 - Job training programs geared to adults with higher literacy skills
 - The learning that adults have done over their lifetime is often not counted. It is not surfaced through traditional assessments.



“Large numbers of people who are far from job-ready and who are among the very poor could, with the right programs in place, improve their own and their children’s and families’ circumstances.

Engagement in the community is likely to increase, and volunteer opportunities open up. In many cases employment becomes a future possibility.


But even when employment is not the ultimate outcome, the benefits of literacy are many, as a large body of literature attests.”

The Next Step: Literacy Programming in Manitoba, Jim Silver 2014



Back to the beginning....

*Literacy and poverty, poverty and literacy,
were strongly linked.*







► **How does literacy influence poverty?**





► **How does poverty influence literacy?**

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- ▶ **How does the relationship between poverty and literacy get reflected in my organization?**

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- ▶ **How does this relationship between poverty and literacy get reflected in my work with adult learners?**

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- ▶ **What can be done to strengthen the profile of literacy as a vital component of poverty reduction?**

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- ▶ ‘Poverty is entrenched through poverty of opportunity. For literacy to be a tool in the fight against poverty, it needs to make opportunities available to those who need them most. ‘

National Forum on Literacy and Poverty 2017



Re-contextualizing Literacy and Poverty Three Bow Valley College Initiatives.





Adult Basic Literacy Education (ABLE) redesign

Bow Valley College is the only Post-Secondary institution in Alberta with adult literacy courses (below academic upgrading and high school) in the province.

These courses are externally grant funded and require annual renewal and reporting.

We offer ABLE Reading/Writing, ABLE Math and ABLE Computers. Each course is a commitment of 85 hours/term. These are no-fee/non credit. These learners have access to ALL learner services within BVC.

ABLE learners are not eligible for Alberta Works funding because these courses are non-credit....and do not map readily with upgrading and high school.



Adult Basic Literacy Education (ABLE) redesign

We are currently reviewing the curriculum and developing a third adult literacy course.

'Barriered financially' is one of the criteria for acceptance into our ABLE courses.

Surfacing 'poverty' in our curriculum is a challenge we are setting for ourselves.

How and why we use assessments is also being examined.



Lifeline to Literacy in Community

Lifeline to Literacy has been offered on campus alongside the ABLE courses for many years. It operated in the evenings. Over time our registration numbers got very low. After much thought, and discussion with the external grant funder, a decision was made to close the evening courses and move them into the community.

We currently run 3 literacy courses (each class happens once/week for 2.5 hours) in three different homelessness serving agencies. The agency recruits the learners, provides space and an agency staff member attends the class. BVC provides the instructor and materials and in one instance a passionate volunteer.

We have built partnership agreements with all 3 agencies.



Lifeline to Literacy in Community

These learners have multiple barriers, not all of them adult literacy, and they are slowly coming into the classroom with us.

At the beginning of each class the Instructor has implemented a learning activity which gets called by us 'critical literacy' problems. Learners have been encouraged to bring in a reading/writing or math challenge from their week. The Instructor and other learners share experience, knowledge with each other to build capacity and share problem solving. The Instructor then might focus on a particular literacy strategy, with the group, that helps unlock the puzzle of that problem.

These learners are also encouraged to tell us what topics they would like to discuss. We then build our 'curriculum' around that. Ie Nutrition/ Food security.




Lifeline to Literacy in Community

The partnership agreements also include the opportunity for BVC to work with the agency to increase knowledge and understanding about adult literacy and it's connection to poverty.

We have the opportunity to provide lunch 'n learns, Literacy Audits, professional development etc.


One agency has us coming for an afternoon to present to all frontline and admin staff. Another has asked us to work with their employment prep team as well as case workers.



Working Together at the Intersection of Adult Foundational Learning, Literacy and Poverty


The CanLearn Society and the Centre for Excellence in Foundational Learning, Bow Valley College partnered to work on this project.

- ▶ *The goal of the project is to build a stronger strategic alignment between the poverty reduction sector and the adult literacy and foundational learning sector in Calgary. Increased knowledge and understanding about the intersection of these issues will create opportunities to work together to decrease barriers for adults experiencing poverty and low literacy.*



Working Together at the Intersection of Adult Foundational Learning, Literacy and Poverty

- ▶ *Lorene Anderson will be interviewing literacy and poverty reduction organizations to find out what knowledge and intentionality they have around the two issues. She will also facilitate a Community of Practice, examining current intersections, gaps and opportunities.*
- ▶ *In May we will hold a one day summit, open to the wider community. This project is connected to a larger national initiative that Frontier College has been working on.*

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- “I see a lot of people who are afraid to learn or they have had negative experiences in learning. I think it is possible to ignite that flame....but it takes a willingness to risk and be vulnerable on the [practitioners] part.”

Dr. Tara Hyland-Russell, Humanities 101, St. Mary's University

