



Creating a Culture of Care and Safe Learning

Reflecting on our practices in community-based literacy programs

Use these materials, please...



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This tool is one part of: *Web-based tools to support effective learning and teaching for survivors of violence*: A project of the School of Work and College Preparation, Centre for Preparatory and Liberal Studies, George Brown College, in partnership with Spiral Community Resource Group.



All the tools can be found online at:
<http://www.learningandviolence.net/changing.htm>

Canada

This project is funded by the Government of Canada's Office of Literacy and Essential Skills.

The opinions and interpretations in this publication are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of the Government of Canada.

April 2011

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Thanks to all the literacy practitioners and students who agreed to participate in interviews and focus groups and gave us a deeper understanding of the problems and possibilities of community-based literacy programming.

Voices from the community – most are extracts from interviews, edited for clarity, others were written by Guy Ewing, Saffa Hamid, and individual members of the writing team.

1. Welcome to the Community-based Reflection Guide on Learning and Violence: creating a culture of care and safe learning

“One of the most vital ways we sustain ourselves is by building communities of resistance, places where we know we are not alone.”

bell hooks

Violence often affects what happens in our programs. It is highly likely that more than a few people in our programs—learners, literacy workers, tutors and board members—have been hurt, abused, harassed or mistreated. Perhaps we don’t talk about our experiences of violence, and haven’t thought consciously about how these affect learning, facilitating and tutoring. This guide was developed to support a conscious review of how our ways of working might affect learners and potential learners who have experienced any form of violence in their lives—past or present.

What’s in this reflection guide

This guide addresses these key aspects of working in community-based programs with survivors of any kind of violence:

- the impacts of violence on learning and teaching (Understanding the Issues)
- the importance of social justice, equity and advocacy, and a caring, supportive environment (Foundations for Learning)
- building on these foundational values in our day-to-day teaching and learning (Learning in the Community-based Environment)
- supporting community connections within the program and outside (Tapping Into Our Collective Knowledge and Support)

Within the sections, we look at how each theme relates to learning and violence, share thoughts from learners and practitioners, suggest questions you may find useful in reflecting on your practice, and point the way to some related resources.

Where we’re coming from

Most of the writers of this guide are based at Parkdale Project Read (PPR) in downtown Toronto. Some of us have been at PPR as staff or volunteers over many years, involved in designing and re-designing the program, drawing on anti-oppression principles to address the impact of violence on learning.

As writers our starting point for this guide is a respectful acknowledgement that many community-based literacy workers already have a huge amount of expertise on this issue—in community programs we all work in the context of past and current violence and its impacts every day. Many of us believe that acknowledging and addressing the impacts of violence on learning and reviewing our everyday practices through this lens is an essential part of creating an accessible and equitable community-based literacy program.

How we developed the guide

Developing this guide was a collaborative process. The guide is grounded in the insights and wisdom gathered from interviews with 21 community-based adult literacy workers from Toronto and the surrounding area. Together, they represent experience in at least 13 community-based literacy programs, and some have experience in the school board and college contexts as well. They included women and men, people of colour, First Nations people, and white people. We also held two focus groups, two theme-based literacy groups, and a community meeting with a varied group of learners on the topic of the impact of violence on learning. Learners and practitioners shared their lived experience of struggling to learn amidst violence and its impacts, as well as trying to support others to learn.

We thank all of the people and programs that contributed to the guide by sharing their wisdom, insights, reflections and experience.

How you might use the guide

Our offering takes the form of questions, along with stories, insights and suggestions from ourselves and the literacy workers and learners we interviewed. We hope these reflections will serve as a jumping off point for you and your colleagues (in your program or network) in your own discussions about how violence impacts teaching and learning and how to enhance practices to address these impacts in all aspects of your work. Wherever you are located, whatever your setting, we hope you will be able to find something in this guide to help you think afresh about what **you** can do in your program.

You'll find a glossary with detailed explorations of many of the concepts in this guide at the end of the document.

To delve deeper into some excellent work that has been done on these issues, check out the resources listed throughout the guide. In particular, you might explore other parts of this learning and violence website. (www.learningandviolence.net)

2. Understanding the Impacts of Violence on Learning

The big picture

Violence happens to children, youth and women of all ages everywhere. It also affects men, particularly gay and transgendered men, men with disabilities, and men who are targeted because of their race. Some systemic inequalities and injustices—such as poverty, sexism, racism, colonialism, and discrimination against older people and people with disabilities—are in themselves violent, as well as increasing vulnerability to violence. Violence perpetuates itself: experiences of violence contribute to ongoing violence, directed inwards on the self or outwards on others.

As yet there are no statistics on the numbers of people in Canada or around the world whose learning has been affected by their experiences of violence, or the depth and breadth of such impact. It would be hard to measure the range of violences in people's lives, then show how each violence interconnects and amplifies the others and how they affect people's choices to participate in educational activities, or the success they achieve when they do. Without such statistics it is not easy to bring an acknowledgement of the impacts into educational policy. Nevertheless, there are growing numbers of people and organizations in many parts of the world questioning the impact of violence on learning, and using research or innovative practice to develop ways to address it.

The close-up view

Violence is on a continuum, from humiliating to life-threatening. The details look different in every culture. In our own culture, violence may be so familiar that we don't notice it. Or instead of defining the harsh or humiliating treatment we have experienced as violence, we may see it as normal, or even as something we caused. Still, in every culture and community, there are people working to end both violence and cultural support for violence.

For some of us, violence has shaped who we are and our view of the world. The lessons we learned through violence may have helped us survive in the past, but can also make it harder to learn what we choose to study. In a learning context, the effects of violence can play out in different ways for different people such as: spacing out; acting out; being silent or frozen with feelings of fear and internalized shame, losing hope or dreams; feeling bad, stupid or wrong; and missing school. Some people who experience violence escape into their minds in ways that allow them to excel in academic work, some escape through substances which may lead to addiction, some develop patterns of behaviour that may lead to diagnoses of post traumatic stress

disorder or other mental illness. People may experience any combination of these impacts at one time, or at different stages in their lives.

Locating ourselves in the context of learning and violence

It's easy to slip into the language of 'us and them', believing that violence only affects 'other people'—some other culture, race, or class. Distancing ourselves is one way to cope with the ways that violence enters our lives and learning environments. But it's important to include ourselves in the picture, asking how violence impacts our own lives, our teaching and our learning.

Community-based programs are complex, busy places, and nobody wants to add additional pressures to the workload. But maybe if we talked more with each other about the impacts that violence has on the work—perhaps as a regular agenda item in our staff meetings and network meetings—the discussion and support might begin to nurture us. We're hearing from practitioners how desperately we crave collegial support and reflection time to talk about what we're seeing in our programs and what it brings up for us in our work and our lives. If we address this issue perhaps our work will become easier and more rewarding.

Resources

At www.learningandviolence.net

The issue: Violence <http://www.learningandviolence.net/violence.htm>

The impact of violence on learning: Impact
<http://www.learningandviolence.net/impact.htm>

Making the connections:

I'm doing everything I can: But I'm not seeing the success I hoped for
http://www.learningandviolence.net/makingconnections/making_connections1.pdf

Morrish, Horsman & Hofer: *Take on the Challenge: A Source Book from the Women, Violence and Adult Education Project*
<http://www.learningandviolence.net/lrnteach/challenge.pdf>

In print

Horsman, J. (1999/2000) *Too scared to learn: Women, violence and education*.
Toronto: McGilligan Books/New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

3. Foundations for Learning

This section looks at strengthening foundations for learning that challenge and counteract the violence in our society, and communicate core values of equity, accessibility, advocacy, safety, and support to learners and potential learners and to the wider community.

Challenging systemic violence - a social justice approach to literacy

Changing our individual perspectives and ways of working is important, but making changes in our programs can be even more fundamental and long-lasting. Taking a social justice approach to our work makes room to reflect on issues learners face around diversity, discrimination, and safety. Building equity and advocacy into the program helps learners address these issues, knowing they are not alone.

Equity

Practicing equity is a way to address and redress the violence in our society. It means that our community works together towards ensuring that those of us who are discriminated against and disadvantaged by sexism, racism, heterosexism, ableism, ageism, etc. have the support and the access we need to time, space, resources, information, education, and power.

How is equity a learning and violence issue?

An equity policy or framework can help to address the impact of violence in learners' lives and create a safer, more just and respectful learning environment for all. Creating equity in programs begins with recognizing the many ways that access may be limited for various learners. For example, a flight of stairs is a barrier for those of us who use wheelchairs and walking aids, and attitudes about people with disabilities create further barriers. Practices that address inequality and the impacts of violence will support learners to contribute and fully engage in their learning. Talking about and addressing equity, difference and accommodations in the program and elsewhere can help learners to feel less ashamed, invisible, scared or angry, and can help them to be aware of their rights within and outside the program.

Shared understandings and strategies

Working within a framework of social equity can move us beyond mere tokenism into creating transformative learning spaces. Practices which are vital for success for many survivors of violence will benefit everyone else as well. If we change our practice to eliminate barriers, we don't need to ask ourselves questions about who has (or hasn't)

experienced violence, what kind of violence 'counts', how much violence it takes to create learning problems, or whether a particular learner's problems are due to learning disabilities or past or present violence.

Equity is quite different from the concept that we should treat all learners equally—it suggests that we acknowledge and accommodate differences, that we see the whole person in the context of power relations and take individual experience and barriers into account. Identity is complex; communication is multi-layered and subtle and it's not always easy to 'get' people. Having people on staff whose lived experiences reflect those of the community we serve is one important manifestation of equity. Ensuring that learners play an integral role in program decisions (for example, being on the hiring committee) is another.

Voices from the community

"As a white literacy practitioner, I have learned over the years how important it is for me to reflect on my own 'isms' and to ensure that the staff and tutors reflect the diversity of the learning population. Positioning ourselves within a social justice and equity framework involves deep and sometimes uncomfortable self-reflection. It can mean critical feedback from learners and colleagues that they may challenge our concept of ourselves as good well-intentioned literacy practitioners, and it can mean accepting that we can make mistakes and offering an apology when we do. It is a process of interrogating our power and privilege, both earned and unearned, and its impact on our learning spaces and our communities. This work is ongoing and requires reflection leading to action. Often those actions are small but powerful."

We ask ourselves and our colleagues...

- What are some of the ways that inequalities in our society are reproduced in our learning communities?
- What is our Human Rights and Equity policy? Can we explain it to a learner? How do we connect our Human Rights and Equity policy to program and group guidelines?
- How committed is our program to equity hiring processes? How are they implemented?
- What kinds of discrimination do we see happening in our groups—for example, do learners laugh, or roll their eyes, when some other learners speak? Who receives this treatment? How do we address it when it happens?
- Whose voices are dominant in our literacy groups and whose are silent? Are people silent about their experiences, sexualities, religion, and families when they are not part of dominant culture?

- How can we make our program safe and inclusive for all learners, regardless of their race, ethnicity, gender and gender identity, sexual orientation, mental and physical health or ability?
- What strategies are helping us to consciously bring our awareness of power issues into our conversations with learners? What are some ways that we try to close the gap between staff and learners, and between different groups of learners?
- How do we make space to reflect on our own 'isms', judgments and assumptions?
- How might we acknowledge that the literacy program is on Aboriginal land (as all the land of what is now called Canada was once the territory of Indigenous people)?

Resources

Lopes, T. & Thomas, B. (2006). *Dancing on live embers: Challenging racism in organizations*. Toronto: Between the Lines.

Advocacy

"If you are here to help me, then you are wasting your time, but if you are here because your liberation is bound up in mine, then let us begin."

Aboriginal activists group, Queensland, 1970s.

How is advocacy a learning and violence issue?

For learners who are affected by violence, advocacy can often make the difference between their staying in and becoming connected to the community, or slipping through the cracks and losing access to learning in a program. Experiences of violence, including systemic violence, can contribute to feelings of isolation and being unworthy of care, as well as impacting one's material situation. Advocacy helps shift those feelings of isolation, and supports learners to address the various barriers and challenges in their lives. In addition to helping address social injustices, being a strong advocate shows respect for the whole learner, and helps learners feel supported and cared about, which in its turn can support their learning journey.

Shared understandings and strategies

In a literacy program, advocacy means working alongside learners in challenging systemic oppression and tackling concrete barriers such as poverty, housing, transportation, health care, childcare, and immigration issues. It begins with truly listening to and acting on learners' concerns and needs, and often involves challenging unequal power relationships.

At the personal level, we can support learners by not judging, recognizing that their choices are theirs to make, even if they are not what we believe they should do, or

what we would do in those circumstances. We recognize that we cannot know the full context that shapes each person's actions.

At the program level, we can ensure that there is power sharing in the program (for example, that program evaluations allow concerns and complaints to be heard, and that there is follow-up and action). We can work to strengthen and develop equitable relations throughout the program, and make sure that learners have opportunities for meaningful participation in the direction of the program. We can create curriculum that includes advocacy projects learners are eager to explore.

At the community level, we can collaborate with other programs to ensure that referrals are reliable and sustainable for learners. We can work in partnership with learners to access reliable services by building community connections. We can create opportunities for learners who may be interested in linking their personal struggles with the struggles of others in the community, and provide information about systems and structures.

At the broader societal level, we can be critical of how resources are unfairly distributed in society according to race, gender, ability, age, class, and regional privilege. We can use our resources for social change, and take collective action in our community (for example demonstrating at anti-poverty rallies to show our solidarity and support).

Voices from the community

“Every one of us is born with a subjective belief that is extremely hard to unlearn or may be impossible to avoid. However, to be effective at the job of community building we have to shade our subjective beliefs to be effective facilitators.

Objective truths however are harder to define and lay out. What are the objective rules? Is it what the current government laid out, or what our religious leaders teach us? We all know these laws and rules change from time to time and as we mature as a society. So we are left to decide what is the best approach to hand individuals that have different upbringing and much different beliefs than the accepted status quo.

One proposed solution is to approach each person as an individual and not label him or her in a box of categories. We need to understand each individual's beliefs and fears and visions. As advocates, when we force learners to accept so-called 'objective values' we are only alienating them and forcing them to retreat to their shell of silence and shame. By understanding the values of the learners, however, we come into a middle ground that is acceptable for the learners to make gradual changes, that enable them to live life outside physical and systemic abuse and violence.”

“Can you just do it?” I hear this a lot when I suggest to a learner that we sit together and talk about what she might say to her worker, or what she might want to put in a letter to her superintendent or immigration lawyer. There is a fine line between advocating alongside a learner – supporting her social activist response to injustice, or translating a

bureaucracy so that she can determine her next move – and advocating for a learner – using my power as a white literacy worker to take more of a leadership role, contacting individuals myself to get clarification or response to an issue, or challenging the system and its barriers to learners – either directly or indirectly, such as letting the person in charge know that I will be following the situation and will get involved if needed. When a student is in economic crisis and under deadline pressure to get some paperwork done or calls made, it may not be the best time to request her full participation in the reading, writing and communication necessary to get the information she needs. She may just want results so she can get her problem resolved and take some of the pressure off. Is this ‘taking over’, undermining a person’s learning or independence – even when they ask for the help? Or is this what those of us with power can do to support students who are discriminated against or excluded from the system at this moment, while also working with them over the long term to build up their confidence and skills needed for fuller a self-advocacy next time.”

“I’m always learning and taking direction from students around political activism. They are more directly involved in community struggles than I am. I appreciate their knowledge and expertise in this area. They keep the program up-to-date around anti-poverty rallies, demonstrations, and speakers.”

We ask ourselves and our colleagues...

- What role does advocacy play in our program? Are advocacy, self-advocacy and activism part of our curriculum?
- What are some of the common inequities that have affected our learners’ experiences of learning? How have we dealt with these at the program level? At the community and societal level? Is there more we want to do?
- In what ways does our program act as an advocate for social justice? In what ways do we act as a charitable service provider, simply ‘helping’ those who ‘need help’? What pushes us in each direction?
- How can we show learners that we are their partners in the collective struggle against institutional oppression (for example, discrimination or mistreatment in the education, social assistance, health care, and mental health systems)?
- What is our knowledge of and relationship to the community supports available to women, men, families and communities who have experienced violence?
- How can we increase learners’ power/voice within our program?
- What activities can we do that promote learners advocating for themselves and each other?
- What does a literacy organization gain by doing advocacy work? What do we risk by doing / not doing it?

Resources

At www.learningandviolence.net

The complexity of violence: In our World

<http://learningandviolence.net/violence/ourworld.htm>

Making changes: Personal Safety <http://learningandviolence.net/violence/safety.htm>

Making changes: Community Action

<http://learningandviolence.net/violence/community.htm>

Making changes: [Global Justice](#) <http://learningandviolence.net/violence/global.htm>

Learning and violence: Helping Yourself Learn

<http://learningandviolence.net/helpself.htm>

Help yourself learn: Student kit <http://learningandviolence.net/changing.htm>

Crisis (Door 5): Student kit <http://learningandviolence.net/changing.htm>

Access and communication: Click on the laptop

<http://learningandviolence.net/helpothr/hlpothers.htm>

Lash, H.: Walking the line

<http://learningandviolence.net/lrnteach/material/walkingtheline.pdf>

Battell, E. et al: Moving research into practice

<http://www.learningandviolence.net/changing/ElevenResearchers/ElevenResearchers.htm>

The learning space

We try to create safe, comfortable, informal learning spaces where community is valued and nurtured. But we have limited resources, and are seldom able simply select the optimal physical space.

How is the learning space a learning and violence issue?

Learners have taught us that how we design and foster our learning space is crucial for them to feel safe and truly welcome. The physical space and the sense of community contribute to these feelings. When we have experienced violence we often struggle acutely with feelings of fear, isolation, being 'wrong', not belonging, and with a belief that there will never be enough of anything for me. These feelings can return whenever we are under stress. Yet space can also communicate the crucial messages that people are safe, that they belong, that they deserve to be there. For many learners, especially those whose previous learning experience involved trauma and violence, this sense of belonging to a caring community can be transformative.

Shared understandings and strategies

Many community-based literacy programs work very hard to create and maintain a safe and holistic space – one that nurtures the whole person, where there is beauty; good food and water; a feeling of abundance and space for focused study in pairs and small groups; enthusiastic discussion and friendly chats; quiet relaxation and retreat into a comfy chair or the world of the computer; space for a variety of creative activities; and play and homework for children.

We are challenged to maintain a sense of fairness and abundance when funding for supplies is limited. Experiences of poverty and other forms of violence have left some of us struggling to maintain a minimum standard of living, and/or feeling that we never get enough. Because of this, we may try to stock up on food or supplies that are seemingly abundant in the organization, or may feel hurt and indignant if we are denied a vital support such as child care subsidy or public transport tokens or tickets.

Another challenge is to make sure that the use of the space does not confirm hierarchical relationships. Although staff need quiet space to work and safe places to store valuable supplies, we do not want to exclude the community from the office space. Although sometimes we will want learners to all be able to see a white board or flip chart, we avoid set ups of chairs and tables that replicate the inequalities of schooling, preferring to set up learning circles that reinforce the idea that we all bring knowledge to the learning situation.

Often the space is too small for everyone and their different needs and desires to settle in easily. It is usually an ongoing challenge for busy practitioners to find the time and resources to balance and support these conflicting needs. Particularly in small spaces, the tensions of conflict are public, influencing everybody's learning environment. But we know that at its best space can help people feel valued and cared for and safe to let their guard down and take the risks that learning involves.

Voices from the community

"We need a visible and stated policy on safety."

"Through the violence and learning work over the years, we have learned a lot about space and its impact on how we feel. We anticipate that some new systems and adequate storage space will have a huge impact on our stress and well being as a staff. We have also purchased some new furniture and will be revitalizing the living room into a more relaxed, welcoming, and nurturing space. And we now have a built-in, durable dishwasher that will alleviate enormous frustration around dealing with the endless mess of a highly used kitchen. This will also be a good opportunity for us to put up some new pictures/beauty/messages in the space (including anti-violence and/or pro-peace posters). Perhaps this can be done collectively with the community's input."

“I came a while ago and everything was so different. You guys really cleaned up and got some new stuff. I didn’t really want to come before—I thought “yuck”. Now I like it and I want to come.”

“Decluttering helped us to create more space for learners to spread out their books, etc.—creating a space of your own is important for some learners. We also learned to make the physical space feel more comfortable, safe and nurturing by using plants, calming colours, good chairs, good lighting, pictures and inspirational quotes; and by making sure there are quiet spaces available for private conversations, reflection, and time-outs.”

“We usually sit in front of learners. We should probably be looking at classroom design and move around the class more, sitting side by side, asking learners about setting, seating arrangements, etc.”

*“At Project Hope, we believe that a clean, comfortable, and friendly atmosphere can foster learning. We want our learners to feel the same qualities that the space represents: beauty, worthiness, abundance, and self-care. This promotes self-worth and self-esteem—a core goal of our program. If our learners feel self-worth because we have provided an enriched learning environment and special classes that boost self-esteem, then it will carry over to the other areas like reading, writing, and math. ... At the Adult Learners Program (ALP), we wish to create a ‘sacred space’ for learning because we believe that each woman in our program is sacred and has every right to take up space. Our understanding of the word ‘sacred’ is analogous to Webster’s definition, ‘worthy of respect’.” (From “Creating Sacred Space – Supports for Low-Income Women in Adult Literacy Programs”, in *The Change Agent*, September 2004.)*

We ask ourselves, and our colleagues...

Physical Space:

- What are people seeing when they walk into the program? What kind of feeling might people get from the space?
- What does our waiting area tell people? How long does it take before somebody talks to them? Is there information about the program, in accessible language? Are there healthy snacks and beverages, with an invitation to ‘help yourself’?
- Is our space clean and tidy? Whose job is it to make it so? If it’s everybody’s job, are we organized to collectively stay on top of it? What’s the benefit to us (practitioners) if it gets done?
- Is the space welcoming and homey, with a variety of comfortable seating?
- Are there quiet areas as well as areas for group work, with separate space for private conversations, reflection, time-outs or prayer?

- Is the space decorated with plants, flowers, pictures, etc.? How does this get done? Is there opportunity for learners to have input?
- Is the building close to public transport? Do people feel safe in the area around the building? If not, are there things we can do to make it safer?

Cultural space:

- How does our environment show that we care about learners' wellbeing on all levels—intellectual, emotional, physical, spiritual, social and aesthetic?
- Do the information signs in the program use clear language and a respectful, good-natured tone? Are they having the effect we want?
- Do the posters, etc. represent the diversity of current and potential learners in the program?
- How do we work so that learners feel that they are safe? That the program is just and treats everyone fairly? That they belong in the community of the program?
- In what ways do we model and support learners to practice compassion and respect for others?
- How are children welcomed, respected and accommodated in the space (for example, small chairs and tables, toys, etc.?)
- Do we have ways of dealing with oppressive behaviour in the program space in a way that everyone can learn from? Are there clear policies to guide us when someone's behaviour is unacceptable enough to ask them to leave?

Resources

At www.learningandviolence.net

Strategies for instructors and tutors: Helping others learn
<http://www.learningandviolence.net/helpothr/hlpothers.htm>

Impacts of violence: Not enough
<http://www.learningandviolence.net/impact/notenough.htm>

Learning processes: Holistic models
<http://www.learningandviolence.net/learning/holistic.htm>

Learning processes: Expressive arts
<http://www.learningandviolence.net/learning/arts.htm>

Learning processes: Participatory approaches
<http://www.learningandviolence.net/learning/approaches.htm>

Informal counseling: communities as spaces of possibility and healing

“The core experiences of psychological trauma are the disempowerment and disconnection from others. Recovery therefore is based upon the empowerment of the survivors and the creation of new connections. Recovery can take place only in the context of relationships - it cannot occur in isolation.”

Judith Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, p. 133)

By informal counseling, we mean listening to and supporting people when distressing experiences and feelings come up and get in the way of their learning in the program – in contrast to the more formal counseling provided by trained professional counselors, psychologists and social workers. Adult literacy in community-based settings has not traditionally included much counseling, formal or informal. Counseling has not often been funded, or validated in program culture. Yet practitioners often feel the pull to support students in this way.

How is informal counseling a learning and violence issue?

For many literacy learners and potential learners, returning to a learning environment can bring up painful memories of childhood, of abusive schooling environments, early struggles to learn, and feelings of personal failure. For learners struggling with the impacts of individual and systemic violence, informal counseling with someone they trust can be key to preventing old survival patterns from blocking successful learning, and an important support in reaching their educational and life goals. Informal counseling can also create an interest in seeking more intensive help in healing and making desired changes.

Shared understandings and strategies

Some programs have an on-site counselor while other programs have partnerships with local community health centres and counselors. However, many programs do not have close access to counseling services, and even those who do may find there are barriers such as waiting lists, approaches that don't fit all learners' needs, a lack of culturally appropriate options, lack of childcare or transportation, and the stigma attached to seeing a counselor.

Because learners live with many difficult circumstances, and learning can be a strong trigger for memories of violence, we often find ourselves in a counseling role. Many tutors and practitioners worry about being overwhelmed by stories of violence, about not knowing how to respond to intense emotions (the learner's and our own), about saying the wrong thing and making things worse. During these moments, we remind

ourselves that we don't have to 'fix' anything – just to be present, listen deeply, and trust the person's ability to find their own solutions.

There are many ways we can make informal counseling part of our programs. We can look for resources and approaches which avoid looking at distress and struggle as illness or personal fault, and which put learners at the centre of their lives and choices. We can invite outside counselors to give presentations and workshops; share (with learners and each other) techniques for coping with overwhelming feelings and staying present to learn and teach; and provide individual or group sessions with learners and literacy workers to support healing and learning. Even in rural areas where people and other resources are often scarce, some creative hunting can usually unearth counselors and other allies – working on hotlines, in schools, or in other organizations.

Learning from 'Narrative Counseling' principles and practices

Experiences of trauma and violence can easily become internalized as personal, rather than identified and addressed as systemic injustices. When responding to these experiences, we try to help people retell and re-frame their stories—which may help them recognize their strengths and resilience. We have found that processes learned from Narrative Counseling are an excellent way to facilitate this. Narrative counseling approaches our lives as stories that we want and need to tell. Our stories are rich evidence of strengths and resources, wishes, hopes, and desires. The retelling of stories allows new meanings to be constructed, and invites people to explore and engage differently with their lives. In our literacy practice, the principles of narrative counseling have challenged us to notice and question how we engage with learners' stories. We try to:

- recognize that we all are experts on our own lives, and honour each other's lived experiences and expertise
- bear witness to learners' stories and problems by actively listening and asking questions that externalize, contextualize and politicize their problems
- challenge dominant ideas such as that some people can't learn, or don't want to learn
- avoid making assumptions, and ask permission to ask questions
- recognize that learners have multiple stories to share and that there are stories in the shadows, which may not be visible
- listen and respond to learners' stories from a place of genuine curiosity
- use a strength-based approach, not a deficit-based approach
- avoid giving advice and trying to 'solve' other people's problems

- be careful that praise we offer is not experienced as condescending or even patronizing

Voices from the community

“Years ago I was working with a learner who kept telling me the same story over and over again of a sad incident in her life that happened twenty years ago. I would often find myself only half listening and trying to change the subject. But when I asked a counselor what else I should do, I was surprised. She simply suggested asking the learner directly and warmly why she thought she kept telling that same story. Funnily enough I can’t remember how the learner answered me – what I remember clearly was that she seemed happy to think about and try to answer that question and she began to tell new stories and to look at what she wanted to do about that sad reality in her life. I remember the sense that we forged a stronger connection and I was able to be a better ally for her. But what stays with me most strongly was that I was running away, avoiding, but when I turned and faced the difficult story, asking directly about the piece that was troubling me – and troubling her – it was helpful to us both. Now I wonder that such an obvious solution seemed so surprising at the time!”

“Women are like a big, overstuffed trunk of luggage, can't open even a little bit or the whole will fall out/collapse/be exposed.”

“I tutored one learner for ten years, over those years I really saw the value of digging in and unpacking the tough stories this learner carried with her. There is much I could tell about how gut wrenching those stories were – but two things stand out – that as she freed herself from the shame she had carried she was gradually able to make crucial changes in her life including improving her reading and writing – and that once she had told the hard stories she seemed freer to remember stories of humour and precious moments in her childhood that the pain had hidden.”

We ask ourselves, and our colleagues...

- What informal counseling supports are available in our program for learners, tutors, or staff who are experiencing, witnessing, or hearing stories about violence and trauma? How are these supports working for us and our learners?
- What kinds of strategies are we able to share with each other about living with or beside a history of abuse and trauma?
- What training is needed to help practitioners feel comfortable with informal counseling?
- How do we respond when people disclose stories of violence and express emotions?
- How do we respond when a learner or learners have expressed the need to stop writing and talking about painful stuff?

- What kind of position do we adopt when hearing problem-oriented stories? How can we resist giving advice and imposing values? What helps us stay curious and avoid judging and trying to 'fix'?
- How do we help learners to shift from deficit-identified stories to alternative, strength-based stories? How can we use conversations and writing prompts to support them in shaping their stories into stories of possibility?

Resources

At www.learningandviolence.net

Working with counselors: Click on the poster

<http://www.learningandviolence.net/helpothr/hlpothers.htm>

Learning to teach: Scenarios

<http://www.learningandviolence.net/lrnteach/material/briefscenarios.pdf>

Responding to disclosures: Making stories of violence known

<http://learningandviolence.net/violence/makingstories.htm>

Helping yourself learn: Find helpers

<http://www.learningandviolence.net/helpself/helpers.htm>

Helping yourself learn: Help yourself

<http://www.learningandviolence.net/helpself/helpyourself.htm> Other links

Narrative therapy: Dulwich Centre <http://www.dulwichcentre.com.au/common-questions-narrative-therapy.html>

Narrative therapy: [Narrative Therapy Centre](http://www.narrativetherapycentre.com/)

<http://www.narrativetherapycentre.com/>

In print

Morgan, Alice. (2000). *What is Narrative Therapy? An easy-to-read Introduction*. Adelaide: Dulwich Centre Publications.

Yuen, Angel and Cheryl White, editors. Preface by Taimalieutu Kiwi Tamasese. Postscript by Ruth Pluznick. (2007). *Conversations about gender, culture, violence & narrative practice: Stories of hope and complexities from women of many cultures*. Adelaide: Dulwich Centre Publications.

Horsman, Jenny. (1999/2000). Bridging the Divide Between Literacy and Therapy. In Horsman, J. *Too Scared to Learn*. Toronto: McGilligan Books/Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Supporting accessibility for learners with children: childminding in the program

With child care subsidies, or childminding on site, many prospective literacy learners are able to attend a program, and focus on their learning with peace of mind. Without these supports many may be unable to attend a program on a regular basis.

How is childminding in the learning space a learning and violence issue?

For parents, grandparents and others who care for children on a daily basis, the lack of quality, affordable, accessible childcare can be a major barrier to participating in a learning program. Many institutions in our society are not child-friendly. Both of these issues are forms of discrimination against children and their caregivers.

Adults who spend long hours away from their children at work, and those who have experienced violence, are often acutely anxious about leaving their children at home with a childminder, even if a subsidy is provided. Knowing this, some literacy programs provide childminding on site to ensure that learning is accessible and safe for both adult and child. Childminding on site provides parents, who may be feeling isolated, an opportunity to connect with other parents and caregivers, without feeling guilty that they are taking time for themselves. It provides opportunities to develop creative learning activities to address issues children or caregivers might face, such as coping with schools, or dealing with bullying.

Shared understandings and strategies

For many parents, providing childminding in the program space frees them to focus on their learning, less preoccupied by worry about their children's safety. For others, the vigilance developed through experiences of violence can mean they are distracted from their studies by the sounds of children. Parents and other learners may be tense about sharing the space with children, wanting uninterrupted time for themselves. So we have to address issues of equity with learners who do not have small children, as well as those who find it hard to concentrate in their presence.

Having parents and children together in the learning space can bring up some very complex challenges. For example, we do not allow violence to happen in the program, but whose judgment of what is violent should be given privilege in the space? How do we respond to people who say: "I'm glad I was hit as a child. It helped me learn right from wrong?" What about verbal abuse? What about suspicions of neglect? What about verbal or written stories of abuse at home, from the children or from the parents? How do we talk about the line between discipline and abuse in the context of different cultural norms, family traditions and life experiences? Do we talk not only about Canadian law, but also about the impact of violence on children and what research says about the cyclical nature of violence? At what point are we imposing our own values onto other people's lives, and what are the ethics of that? For example, if we

know that learners are taking their girl children back home for female circumcision, how can we talk about it in a culturally sensitive way?

We have learned that negotiating these difficult tensions is hard but necessary. This requires building trusting relationships with the parents to ensure that they don't feel judged when we openly address complex issues that leave many of us feeling uncomfortable. We try to turn these tensions into learning opportunities by thoughtfully selecting reading materials that will encourage critical reflection and discussion, for example about parent's rights, children's rights, cultural differences and social norms and values.

We have also found it useful to have regular meetings that encourage the community to participate and share ideas and solutions around the tensions of having learners and children in the same space. For example, there is sometimes a perception that children are noisy, when more often it is the adults who get rowdy as they discuss their reading materials with passion and enthusiasm—which we all agree is a good thing. We discovered that when the learners are involved in the decision making process, they are more committed to follow through with the decisions. It also helps share the power and sense of ownership of the space.

Voices from the community

“Parents are often protective of their kids instead of being lenient. They want to protect kids from strangers and family. They don't want to repeat the cycle of violence.”

“How do we approach a parent about something being off with their child? I can say: “Hey, she's not really herself today. Is there anything that happened at school?”

“When I see parents being hard on their kids in the program, it's sometimes unclear to me where discipline ends and abuse begins. I feel like I'm overstepping if I challenge the way they speak to or touch their children. I don't want to undermine their authority but, in some situations, I don't feel comfortable letting it go and saying nothing. I want to at least acknowledge to the child that I don't agree with what their parent has said or done, that I think it's wrong. But, at the same time, I don't want to shame the parent or jeopardize our relationship of trust. My social and cultural background may determine how I view the situation and it may be different from others in the program. So to help me gauge my response I use as a guide: our organization's anti-violence policy (we strive to be a safe place for everyone, including kids); what the research says about the damaging effects of violence (including put-downs, corporal punishment, shaming, etc.) on a child's development; what I've learned about the often negative impact of Children's Aid Society involvement – especially with racialized families; and Canadian law regarding child abuse.”

We ask ourselves, and our colleagues...

- What supports does our program offer for parents or others caring for children?

- What have we found to be the benefits of this (for the adults, the children the program, the community)?
- What have we found challenging about supporting parents as learners and/or having children in the space?
- What policies, procedures, staff supports, community partnerships, etc. do we have in place to support this aspect of the work?
- How do we respond to behaviour we see as abusive? When and how do we intervene? How do we balance protecting the children with compassion for the adult?
- How would we involve child protection authorities if we needed to? What resources and/or supports are available for addressing situations that could involve child protection authorities?
- How do we speak to the parents if we are concerned about their children's behaviour, for example if they express a racist (or internalized racist) attitude?
- How do we deal with all this in the context of different cultural norms, family traditions and life experiences?

Resources

At www.learningandviolence.net

Responding to disclosures: Making stories of violence known

<http://learningandviolence.net/violence/makingstories.htm>

Helping our children learn: Click on the poster

<http://www.learningandviolence.net/helpothr/hlpothers.htm>

Supporting learning for all: Helping others learn

<http://www.learningandviolence.net/helpothr/hlpothers.htm>

Making the connections: I despair: What's the point of teaching adults when nothing changes and their kids are going to have the same problems

http://www.learningandviolence.net/makingconnections/making_connections6.pdf

Outreach and profile in the community

Our literacy program's profile in the neighbourhood can mean the difference between learners finding us or not, between learners feeling comfortable enough to call or drop in, or carrying our number around with them for months. We want to ensure that our community outreach is friendly, caring, and welcoming, and encourages potential learners to envision a place for themselves in the program.

How is our program's profile in the community a learning and violence issue?

Dealing with the impacts of violence leaves many prospective learners filled with self-doubt and fears about whether they can learn successfully. Many will have had negative experiences of schooling. In the context of self-doubt, negative associations with schooling, and fear about entering a new learning environment, it's important that learners know that our programs are different from what they fear, or what they have experienced in the past.

Shared understandings and strategies

Because prospective learners may be anxious that the program is not for them, that they are 'wrong' in some way, the program's profile in the community is particularly important. Our reputation within ethnic communities and communities of identity (such as psychiatric survivors or *LGBTQ/2S*) may attract certain learners into our programs while leaving others feeling that they don't fit. When prospective learners see learners, tutors, and staff who look or sound or have families or lifestyles or histories like theirs, it may help them to feel that they will be included and respected.

Voices from the community

*"Our program had a strong commitment to connecting literacy with other social issues and other groups in our community. Knowing that many people with literacy barriers never think of attending a literacy program, we made a deal with the local soup kitchen to have a literacy worker spend the lunch hour there once a week and be available to help people read or write letters or forms (basically a scribe service). Not many people came forward but it led to our being asked to provide a weekly 2-hour writing class for participants in the women's drop-in centre in the same space. This led in turn to several of the women – including a First Nations lesbian survivor of the correctional and psychiatric systems who understandably needed a lot of trust-building before she could feel safe anywhere new – entering our program, knowing from their experience spending time with us in **their** space that they could take a chance on coming into **ours**."*

We ask ourselves, and our colleagues...

- What is the 'word on the street' about our program?
- Do our program's communication materials (website, brochures, etc.) indicate our commitment to inclusion and a social justice approach, in language that will make sense to potential learners?
- How do we reach out to all the diverse groups in the community? How do we let them know it's a safe place for them and that they are welcome?
- Are we connected with organizations that also support people who are grappling with personal or systemic violence in their lives? How can we strengthen these partnerships as a source of two-way referrals?

Resources

At www.learningandviolence.net

Dreams of a different world: Images of change

<http://www.learningandviolence.net/dreams/imageslideshow.htm>

Making changes: Community Action

<http://learningandviolence.net/violence/community.htm>

Outreach Flyers: click on example

<http://www.learningandviolence.net/lrnlearn/materials.htm#admin>

4. Learning in the Community-based Environment

In this section we examine different aspects of community-based learning to see how each phase of our program can strengthen support for learners who have experienced violence.

First contacts

First impressions—whether from our outreach materials, from an initial phone call, or from dropping in to the program—can make the difference between someone getting started on a new learning journey or getting discouraged and disheartened—again! And for survivors of violence in any form, this discouragement can stir up and reinforce the pain of old wounds, making it even harder next time—if there is to be a next time.

How are first contacts a learning and violence issue?

Experiences of violence in the past or present may result in many fears: fear of going back to school after being out for so many years; fear of agencies and people with power; fear of revealing too much and feeling exposed; fear of making a mistake, of sounding or looking stupid, of being shamed/punished; fear of being found out—that their brain doesn't really work properly, that they can't learn, that they don't really belong here. Because we are aware that first meetings can stir up old feelings and insecurities, we want to ensure that that we don't replicate the negative experiences people have had in school and other contexts, that they feel accepted and can envision themselves being part of the program. For this reason, we try to build a nurturing, more egalitarian relationship right from the start by not using 'case management' terms such as 'intake' and 'client'.

Shared understandings and strategies

It can take a lot of courage for someone to walk through the door of a literacy program and share their hopes, fears and goals with strangers. We try to gently make it clear that feelings of doubt are ordinary and common—not theirs alone—and that we believe that everyone can learn in their own time.

Many learners have told us how significant the first visit to our program was for them. They almost always remember all the details: who was in the program, where they sat, what we said to them, and how they felt. One learner said that their initial contact was as important to them as their wedding day! So how can we honour and make the most of such important moments? In the context of a bustling learning centre where staff are constantly busy with a myriad of tasks, how do we ensure that first meetings are given the attention they deserve?

Voices from the community

“Learners are not ‘clients’. They are members of our community. We do not know what learners want or need. We do not know, in advance, what learners will learn here. We don’t prescribe what will be learned or value one kind of learning over another. We are not ‘teachers’. We are members of the community that make our knowledge available to learners. Learners take what they need. We learn from learners. We tell learners what we believe about learning, literacy and power. We do not do things that are inconsistent with our personal and collective beliefs, but we do not insist that our personal and collective beliefs are right.”

We ask ourselves, and our colleagues...

First phone call

- How welcoming—and how clear—is our phone message? When people leave messages, how long does it take for us to call back?
- How much time and priority do we place on initial phone contacts? Is it enough? What happens if we're busy?
- Do we have protocols and training around phone manner: (language and tone, what to say / what not to say, how to ask about schooling, how probing to be, the right initial questions to ask so learners don't have to waste their time if the program isn't what they are looking for)?
- Do we have a way to pass the details on to other staff or do people have to tell their whole story again to the next person?
- If we call someone back and have to leave a message, how do we deal with confidentiality?

Initial meetings and entering the program:

- Do we have training and protocols around first meetings and receiving people into the program for the first time? Given what we know about learning and violence, what considerations might we build into these processes?
- Who’s doing our first meetings? Does our staff reflect the cultural diversity of potential learners?
- What do we do to make our first meetings welcoming and reassuring? Do we allocate enough time for first meetings to really pay attention and lay the groundwork for a relationship of trust?
- How do we balance people’s privacy with getting the information we need? What information do we actually need?

- What do people see and hear when they walk into the program? What does our waiting area say to them? How long might they wait before somebody talks to them?
- If tension or conflict arise in the group and they are close enough to overhear, how might this feel? Are there things we can do to make this feel safe?
- How do we respond to the fears that come up during a first meeting? How do we respond to disclosures of present and/or past experiences of violence? Do we talk about the impacts of violence on learning? Do we have simple, clear messaging on these issues?
- How do we determine whether a person will be a good fit with our program, or if their barriers/challenges will get in the way? Do we have ways of making sure this is fair and consistent?
- Do we do a disservice if we invite a person who may not be a good fit in our program? If we decide we can't take them, how do we explain this to them? Do we offer referrals to another literacy program?
- If the person shares other issues they have, do we provide a list of community resources like health, legal and financial services, crisis lines, shelters, food banks, parenting supports, etc.?

Matching and supporting learner-tutor pairs

Although some community-based literacy programs have a number of paid educators, most also have volunteer tutors who are recruited and screened, trained, matched with learners, and supported in the tutoring process. In this section, we look at these activities through a learning and violence lens. Although the section focuses on volunteer tutors, much of the content is also relevant to hiring, training and supporting staff.

How is learner-tutor matching and support a learning and violence issue?

At its best, a learner-tutor partnership can lead to a breakthrough in learning, but at its worst, it can reinforce old negative experiences and negative self-concepts. Volunteer tutors, like many of us, are affected by personal or systemic violence they have experienced. They have their own values and perspectives regarding education, and may have unexamined assumptions about people who are different than they are. For learners who experienced violence and abuse in previous relationships and learning situations, the learner-tutor partnership may be an intense and vulnerable process of getting to know their tutor, testing how much to trust them, and deciding on different days what to share or not share of their lives and themselves. When learners open up

and expose their personal struggles with learning, risking ridicule and shame, it is especially important that the experience is positive, healing, and transformative.

Shared understandings and strategies

To ensure that the tutoring relationship does not replicate past learning situations that felt shaming, or echo any element of past abuse, we choose our tutors carefully, train them as well as we can, match them with care, support them in their tutoring, listen in on their sessions when needed, and provide opportunities for self-reflection and professional development where possible.

Recruiting and screening

We have learned that tutors best able to work with survivors of violence have a good understanding of systemic oppression and are committed to social justice. They are warm, encouraging and can listen deeply. They are self-aware and self-reflective—especially about their own power, their assumptions about people who are different from them, and their personal history with violence and its impacts on learning. They can step back and provide learners the space they need to talk and steer the partnership. They can also be open about their ‘not knowing’—modeling confidence as a fellow traveler on a lifelong learning journey.

Tutors who come from the populations that we serve are often ideal mentors—able to understand cultural nuances, and to connect with learners and really ‘get’ them in ways that others don’t. While it is extra work to do targeted outreach and recruiting, the benefit is often a richer sense of community and enhanced learning. Having staff members who represent learners’ communities makes it easier to draw in tutors of those same communities.

Initial and ongoing tutor training

At its best, tutor training can be a rich, interactive experience where we explore both the nuts and bolts of teaching reading and writing and the context in which people learn. Our training covers creating an equitable learner/tutor partnership; the importance of environment and relationship in learning; the principles of access, equity and inclusion; a look at power and privilege; boundaries; trust and tutor commitment and reliability; teaching holistically—bringing the whole self to learning; the impacts of violence on learning; and our counseling/advocacy role. (See the resources for examples of these training plans and materials.)

This is an opportunity to discuss and model a social justice approach to teaching, as well as to create a culture of care and community in our work. We join tutors in exploring our own struggles with power and privilege, our own journeys in progress. We involve learners and tutors in the training—inviting them to gather with us around small tables, to mix and mingle with new tutors over tea, to tell stories and answer questions.

After initial training, many tutors look for ongoing peer and staff support as well as opportunities to learn more about the impacts of violence on learning, to share ideas and resources, and to be part of the program's community. Theme-based tutor support evenings provide this and may lessen the isolation that tutors often feel working in their one-to-one partnerships. For those with less time, an e-mail support group may be enough. For those with more time and a keen interest in the topic, a book club or discussion group may provide the longer timeframe to build community and to explore the impacts of violence on learning in their partnerships and in their personal lives in more depth.

Matching

Because a good learner-tutor match is so vital for learners whose past experiences in life and learning have not always been positive, programs are looking for ways to make matching safe and comfortable. For example, some programs hold a facilitated post-training, pre-matching 'meet and greet' session, where new tutors meet a group of learners, and learners have input into their matching process. If we're uncomfortable matching a newly-trained tutor with an individual learner, we might invite them to support a group—where they are more directly supervised and can learn more about how we approach the work.

Supporting learner-tutor pairs

Supporting learner-tutor pairs requires frequent check-ins to ensure that things are going well, and that both partners feel they can easily reach out for guidance or support if they need it. We've found that checking in can be tricky: if we check in with the learner and tutor separately, who we speak with first may bias our next conversation. Ideally, we could create an environment in which learner/tutor pairs could feel safe and comfortable to express concerns together, but this can be challenging.

We want learners to know from the start that they can come to staff if they're having problems with their tutor. But some learners say this can be difficult to do. It may be a cultural norm not to complain, to be grateful for any help they get. Some learners may have avoided abuse in their lives by staying quiet and not drawing attention to themselves, and this may prevent their feeling comfortable identifying a problem with a tutor. Others may feel like they're 'ratting out' their tutor, getting them into trouble—also a familiar and stressful dilemma for survivors of violence. In order to support learner/tutor pairs sensitively, carefully observing and listening to what's *not* being said is a useful practice and skill to develop.

We want tutors to know that they can talk to staff about their challenges as well, including the ways that they may be 'triggered' by the issues the learner faces, or the learner's way of coping. Where necessary we help the tutor find counseling supports to help them with the issues that are surfacing.

A careful closure between learner and tutor is an important acknowledgment of the value of the partnership. It acknowledges and honours the connection that was developed, and the work accomplished together—particularly valuable for survivors of violence. When learners are left hanging without any closing conversations or ceremony, they may feel that their trust has been betrayed, that they failed, or are worthless, and they can easily get caught up in old feelings of abandonment and shame. Sometimes our role as literacy workers is to facilitate these goodbyes, to encourage tutors to take personal responsibility for premature endings so that learners aren't left feeling rejected and ashamed. Sometimes it means doing some damage control after the fact. Tutors, too may need support if their learner leaves abruptly or if the partnership didn't work out.

Voices from the community

"I think really bad things can happen in individual tutoring sessions, things that reaffirm people's sense that they can't learn."

"When I'm listening to a learner and tutor interact during a session, I ask myself 'How might this conversation reinforce the learner's shame? How would I feel if someone kept asking me if I remembered what we did last week?'"

"I've seen some very close partnerships that, on the surface, seem wonderful but they often end badly. The learner relies so much on the friendship that when the tutor lets them down, which inevitably happens, the learner is devastated. And a transition to another tutor is difficult because no one will ever live up to the idealized tutor. I think it's unfair for tutors to do this to learners—it seems like it might be about their own desire to feel needed, or even be seen as some sort of saviour. I wonder how I can better support learners and tutors to keep a balance in their relationship."

"The more we delve into this issue [of violence and learning], the more it becomes about "us" not "them". When we held our first discussion group around learning and violence for tutors and staff, we approached the issue from a professional distance, and talked about the impacts of violence on learners (not ourselves). Today, we approach it very differently—as our own issue."

We ask ourselves and our colleagues...

- Do our tutors reflect the diversity of the community we serve? If not, how could we begin to draw in a broader diversity of tutors?
- How does our outreach make clear the qualities and commitment we are looking for in tutors?
- What do we ask incoming tutors to commit to—do we include a period of time, a process which includes a careful beginning, respectful regular meetings, and a thoughtful closure with their learner? How do we formalize the commitment?

- How do we educate ourselves and our tutors about the impacts of violence on learning and the importance of a holistic approach to tutoring? What opportunities are there for tutors to explore the impacts of violence on their own learning, in order to be more sensitive to learners' challenges?
- How do we model a critical, social justice approach to literacy through our training, and encourage tutors to reflect on their power and privilege?
- What factors do we consider when matching tutors and learners? What strategies do we use to foster and nurture strong tutor/learner relationships?
- How do we follow up to ensure that the partnership is going well, especially for the learner? What challenges have we experienced when following up?
- What do we do if we have concerns that a learner/tutor relationship may not be going well? How do we deal with rematches when a match is not working out?
- What do we do to assure learners that they can confide in us about any concerns or questions they have? What are some reasons why a learner wouldn't tell us about a problem with their tutor?
- How do we support tutors to be self-reflective about their relationship with their learner; to notice when they are feeling uncomfortable; to explore their frustration, anger, hurt and thoughts/feelings about learner progress in terms of their own history; and to ask themselves whether they are fleeing from discomfort when they feel like quitting?
- How do we help tutors to put into context the opening, meeting and closing process—and all that may be going on for them and their learner?

Resources

At www.learningandviolence.net

Learning to teach: Outlines and tutor training plans

<http://www.learningandviolence.net/lrnteach/outlines.htm#tutor>

<http://www.learningandviolence.net/lrnteach/materials.htm#tandt>

Lash, H.: Walking the line

<http://learningandviolence.net/lrnteach/material/walkingtheline.pdf>

Overview: Tutor gateway <http://learningandviolence.net/tutor.html>

Responding to disclosures: Making stories of violence known

<http://learningandviolence.net/violence/makingstories.htm>

Giving advice: Advice on giving advice!

<http://www.learningandviolence.net/violence/makingstories.htm>

Eliciting meaningful writing: Click on the book called “Writing”

http://www.learningandviolence.net/helpothr/Eliciting_Meaningful_Writing.pdf

Outreach Flyers: click on example

<http://www.learningandviolence.net/lrnteach/materials.htm#admin>

Working in groups

Many community programs offer a combination of group work and individual tutoring. Group work helps create a nurturing environment, a body of shared experience, and opportunities for participants to learn from each other.

How is working in groups a learning and violence issue?

Groups can be an important aspect of community-based literacy work, and the dynamics in these groups can be powerful for learners who have experienced violence and trauma. On one hand, if learners feel threatened, disconnected, excluded, or simply uncomfortable in groups, a lot of their energy will be spent on self-preservation—taking the focus away from learning. For example, many learners will feel threatened and/or alienated if the group is filled with conflict and tension, feels silencing, or somehow replicates the dynamics of power and privilege (e.g., men, white, non-disabled, or middle class people are dominating); if racist, sexist, ableist, and homophobic statements go unchallenged; if cultural or religious differences are not treated with sensitivity; if they do not feel safe to bring their whole selves, or are triggered by the painful stories or behaviour of others.

On the other hand, the new connections and sense of belonging made in a literacy group can provide opportunities for healing and growth. Groups can become ‘second homes’ for participants, intimate chosen families where we share the stresses of life and allow ourselves to be seen, heard and held by the community. Ideally, they are birthplaces of friendship and creative expression, where camaraderie and learning reinforce each other, where our whole, imperfect selves (body, mind, emotions and spirit) are welcomed and engaged to support learning.

Shared understandings and strategies

Our role as facilitators is to ensure a feeling of welcome, comfort, and relative safety in the group, and to support the building of trust amongst members. This involves creating a space that can respectfully contain the sharing of personal stories and vulnerabilities around learning, where participants can risk exposure because they trust that their frustration, tears, and perceived humiliations will be met with support, encouragement and understanding. By providing a ‘strong container’ (a space where learners feel secure enough to risk expressing their ideas and feelings from the heart while knowing that the facilitator has the necessary skills to navigate conflict and ensure safety and protection from violence), we also hope to hold passionate

ideologies, polarized viewpoints, heated discussion, and in some groups, more than the occasional conflict.

We feel it's important to offer some groups where women and men meet separately. Women who have experienced violence (usually at the hands of men) need safe spaces to heal and express themselves. Feelings of insecurity and/or defensiveness may be triggered by the presence of men in the group—even men who are totally non-violent personally. For some women, a women-only group may be the first time they begin to see other women as allies rather than competitors. When trust is built up such a group can be a crucial place for women to see the commonalities of their experience, tell their stories, and gain support. It can also be an important place to learn about women's health, and to identify and meet some of the resources in the community they may want to use. Men, too, benefit from the chance to explore their commonalities.

As group facilitators, we try to be as present as we can, grounding ourselves by becoming more aware of our own thoughts and emotions in order to be more sensitive and compassionate to what's going on emotionally for learners. We try to be aware of the tension between the importance of safety and support, and the importance of challenging learners and expecting that they will succeed in their efforts. Some strategies we have found helpful in making our groups as safe as possible, respectful, and effective include:

- having co-facilitators, and making ourselves available to participants before and after group
- encouraging the group to take some ownership over the group process by collectively developing their own guidelines and taking responsibility for implementing them
- supporting our bodies by providing nutritious food and regular stretch breaks
- bringing our spirits into the room through rituals such as lighting a candle, playing music, drumming, singing, and creating together
- having a regular check-in to bring everyone's voice into the room early on, and using an approach such as passing a talking stick, stone or other object to ensure that talking space is shared
- using trust-building and getting-to-know-each-other exercises to foster connection and trust
- encouraging participants to begin their statements with 'I' (...think..., ...believe..., ... feel...), which encourages multiple opinions instead of polarized arguments and competing claims to 'the truth'
- exploring varied media and creative activities to bring out our many different voices

- ensuring that people have choices—to participate or not, to do it in their own way
- ending group sessions with special care to prepare us all to go out in to a world that may be stressful, difficult and/or oppressive

Voices from the community

Learners

“If someone listens, it changes you.”

“When I want to say something but don’t get a chance it feels bad. It doesn’t feel comfortable. It’s not right.”

“The group is like a team. The hour goes fast like freedom.”

Practitioners

“We need to be respectful of people’s choice to participate or not. If I felt pressured to be part of the group and I didn’t feel like participating I wouldn’t like that. I may not come again.”

“There is an urgency with which people express themselves because it’s new and it feels good—they don’t want to be reigned in, their voice shut down, they don’t want to share space equally.”

“Women who experience violence (most times at the hands of men) need safe spaces to heal and express themselves. When you invite men, you invite those feelings of insecurity and defensiveness that women create in order to be able to cope. Women need to be able to learn in an environment that doesn’t hinder strength-building.”

“Having a women’s group is very important for women to feel safe to talk openly about their experiences of violence and abuse. What often happens is when we do talk about women’s issues, the women will often share and provide strategies for women in need of escaping violence. As a facilitator for a women’s group, I have noticed a huge shift when men are near our group. The women often shut down. At times, they will talk in their own language.”

“A gender-specific set up is really important for men. In the men’s group there’s a sense of safety. Men wouldn’t say the things they say in front of women. It’s important for me as a male facilitator as well. In a mixed group, I have a fundamental discomfort around certain topics—just as I imagine a white person has a discomfort around power and privilege issues of race. There’s a credibility issue. I’m less apt to challenge or probe a comment from a woman. I feel like ‘who am I to insert myself into that discussion?’ I wonder if I’m tiptoeing rather than engaging. I feel confident with men of colour. I don’t have to hedge. I have complete go-ahead to engage. There’s a certain freedom.”

“Once we started a men’s group, we started to notice more men walking through our doors.”

We ask ourselves and our colleagues...

- What do we notice about our own and other people’s body language in group? What might it mean to the different cultures represented in the group?
- How can we be more culturally aware without stereotyping?
- How do we ensure a shared talking space for active engagement of all voices? How do we acknowledge, invite, and draw out quieter members without being intrusive and causing stress?
- How do we know when to give people space to ‘tune out’ or space out when needed, and how can we invite them back without shaming them?
- How can we create learning spaces where we can tell or not tell our stories, where there is choice about what to speak, and what to hear?
- How do we avoid the detailed stories of violence which may be disturbing or traumatizing for the learner telling the story, other members of the group, and ourselves, while also being careful to avoid any sense that the realities of learners lives are silenced or excluded?
- How can we help each other to re-see our stories, not as ours alone resulting simply from our individual actions, but recognizing the social pressures that contribute to them so that we can create new wisdom, new fire for action for change?
- How do we respond to racist, classist, sexist, and homophobic comments in a group while still respecting people’s cultural and religious values? How do we turn such challenging moments into possibilities for teaching/learning?
- As group facilitators, how do we intervene in conflicts among learners? When are we interfering, rescuing, or avoiding?
- Why might it be important to have separate groups for men and women? What might that space allow?

Resources

At www.learningandviolence.net

Learning processes: Participatory approaches

<http://www.learningandviolence.net/learning/approaches.htm>

Student stories (Doors 1 – 4): Student kit

<http://learningandviolence.net/changing.htm>

In print

Denborough, D. (2008). *Collective narrative practice*. Adelaide: Dulwich Centre Publications.

Curriculum

Curriculum includes the choices that are made about content and process—the topics and materials we select with learners and the methodology with which we introduce and explore them in a group or tutoring situation.

How is curriculum a learning and violence issue?

Like many other programming decisions, the choice of curriculum is a learning and violence issue because it has the potential both to imitate and replicate past violences, and to be a powerful tool for analyzing oppression and bringing a context to the violences many of us face.

Curriculum is a key element in creating a nurturing, enriched learning environment, where learners feel that they, and the ways they learn, are valued and respected and they can let down their guard, take risks, and learn. This can happen when curriculum, whatever its primary content, is infused with principles of social justice; when it captures and acknowledges our diverse identities; when it acknowledges the impact of violence on learning; when it supports bringing the whole self to learning; when it links personal violence to broader social issues of class, race and gender discrimination; and when it gives us information that helps us advocate for ourselves both on a personal and political level.

Shared understandings and strategies

People who have experienced violence often report that their sense of trust in the world and other people has been broken—they have difficulty renewing their trust in the human community, and this can make feeling safe in a learning environment very difficult. So one of the primary tasks of a curriculum is to create an environment of trust, where learners can feel safe to express themselves and develop their skills without fear of humiliation or being shamed. In a nurturing learning environment, learner voices and ideas are heard and recognized, and their unique and individual talents supported and developed. A nurturing curriculum is learner centered, where the facilitator expands possibilities and brings in alternative resources. It is built on strong pedagogical relationships—not imposed but a result of a relational and negotiated process between learner and teacher.

People who have experienced violence often say that they feel invisible and that they do not count; sometimes they report having little sense of self and agency. When learners see themselves and their interests reflected in a curriculum, a process of

identification begins to take place. They realize that they are not alone and isolated through their experiences of violence, but that social, political, and personal violence is unfortunately a shared human experience. They realize that their experience does have meaning and can be expressed within a learning environment; it can be talked about, analyzed, written about and so forth.

People who have experienced violence often continue to live lives full of crisis, and to feel too much anxiety and fear to embark on learning; many of us have learners in our groups who are continually moving around, staring into space, or angry and explosive, unable to focus or concentrate. When a curriculum reflects the understanding that these behaviors could indicate the impact of violence on learning and makes allowance, we are apt to find better strategies for both facilitator and learner to deal with issues that may arise. The awareness that violence could be a barrier to learning is key in helping us understand some of our learners and ourselves.

We create a nurturing learning environment when we create communities of inquiry where learners feel free to engage without the fear of being humiliated and found wanting. We create a nurturing learning environment when we make sure that the content of our curriculum reflects the diversity of history, lives and voices of the learners in our classroom; when all voices are respected and heard, when people feel safe to explore further, to embark on a personal learning journey. Learners feel supported when a curriculum recognizes that learners' lives are complex, and takes into account that learning is not always linear. Learners feel supported through curriculum when their unique skills and identities are recognized and they are given space and time to grow.

Many questions surrounding curriculum as a learning and violence issue are fraught with ambiguity and tension. Many of us grapple with the question of how directly to approach issues of violence in our curriculum. Sometimes it feels necessary to approach the hard work of addressing violence directly; however, this can sometimes be experienced as negative, or even traumatizing, by learners. For example, some of us have had the experience of bringing to our group a powerful piece of writing about violence that we read as moving, thought-provoking and beautiful and thought our learners would relate to, only to have some of them feel angry that they were being brought back to a frightening and confusing place, a place they were trying to escape. Thus, when we approach the often necessary work of looking at violence directly, we try to create a context for the materials we bring, and a safe ground that is sensitive to our learners' needs.

Voices from the community

"I saw a piece I wrote about telling learners ahead of time when we are using hard materials so they can make choices if it feels just too raw to go there, and then I remembered how vehemently I used to believe that what we had to do was to go to hard places in the curriculum—to work directly with people's stories of pain as I did in a long

tutoring relationship. Now I realize how much that came out of my own stories of pain being unheard in my childhood. Now I believe everyone needs more freedom to find out what is right for them. I think it is important to provide spacious writing prompts rather than prescriptive ones, and always make it clear that everyone can make their own choices about whether they want to go to the hard stuff, the pleasant feel-good stuff or anywhere in between. I do think it is a tricky, but vital, balance to show that the tough stuff has its place in tutoring and groups, without suggesting that is always where everyone will want to go, or even that they should."

"One literacy worker spoke about how she had come to see some quite strong challenging as an important part of a nurturing environment. Part of her shift came from learning from her son, who had lost his father and struggled with waves of anxiety, that he needed both nurturing and high expectations. He needed to know that his whole life did not need to fall apart even when certain aspects were so difficult. She told us about her program's attendance policy for an intensive course they offered. She said they really pushed learners to commit to coming regularly, even for a short period of five to six weeks, explaining that they've learned from experience that unless people can find a way to come regularly they don't often succeed. Intensity of instruction makes a difference. She talked about the importance of working with students to help them explore what might get in the way of them attending as well as what supported them to persist, and help them think about ways to not only minimize the obstacles but also strengthen the supports. And she encourages learners to see the program as a support, a place where others are absolutely committed to students' success. Another literacy worker, prompted by this comment, remembered one of her past students who told her she would have liked to have been challenged more, pushed to do more and better work, as well as to attend regularly. She said it would have helped her more in her next course. We all felt the important piece was to make sure that such challenge really is nurturing, and collaborative, clearly coming from an encouraging ally who believes the student can succeed, helps them find their strengths, and works with them to give them the support they need."

We ask ourselves and our colleagues...

- In what ways does our curriculum address the issues of violence? How comfortable do we feel with addressing these issues? What tools and strategies do we use to address violence?
- How does our curriculum (content and approach) reflect the diverse identities and histories of the learners' in our group? How does it make space and insure that all voices are heard?
- Racism and classism are forms of systemic violence. Does our curriculum incorporate an anti-racist perspective? Does it examine issues from the perspective of race and class?

- There has been an extensive critique of some curricula being Eurocentric (only presenting the world from a particular European lens). How can we avoid this bias as we prepare curriculum?
- How do we analyze our curriculum to make sure that it does not include stereotypes and implicit bias?
- How do we incorporate an anti-racist perspective within our curriculum?
- How do we create an inclusive curriculum without appropriating culture or race?

Resources

At www.learningandviolence.net

Helping others learn: [Click on the book called “Design curriculum”](#)

Helping others learn: [Click on “Culture-based education”](#)

Learning and violence: [Helping Yourself Learn](#)

Helping yourself learn: [Help yourself](#)

Student stories (Doors 1 – 5): [Student kit](#)

Other links

Journal: [The Change Agent: An Adult Education Newspaper for Social Justice](#)

In print

Nash, A., Ed. (2006). *Through the Lens of Social Justice: Using The Change Agent in adult education*. Boston: New England Literacy Resource Center.

Evaluation and assessment

Community-based programs are often caught in a tension between the demands of government funders for formal assessments and our desire to recognize the learning that is not revealed by tests and create a comfortable environment for learners to recognize their own achievements.

How is evaluation a learning and violence issue?

Many of us feel anxiety when we undergo traditional forms of testing and assessment. For people who have experienced violence, assessment and evaluation can evoke unsustainable feelings of fear, anxiety and powerlessness. Rather than being a portal to learning and self-realization, assessment and testing often serve as barriers to learning and a means of exclusion—mimicking harsh, external judgments of the past and paralyzing the brain so that we cannot demonstrate the very real learning

accomplished. Rigid expectations for testing that don't take into account the impact of past experiences of violence on test performance can feel violating in themselves, trapping learners in their belief they are unable to succeed in educational programs.

Shared understandings and strategies

A sense of 'all or nothing' (either I'm doing brilliantly or I'm totally failing) is a common consequence of experiences of violence. With 'all or nothing' thinking, 'middle ground'—the place between those two extremes where gradual improvement comes from steady work over a long period of time—can be very hard to see or believe in.

Research has shown that learners feel more empowered when they are involved in their own assessment, and that often our perception of a learner's progress has little to do with how they perceive their own progress. So we work hard to humanize the environment for assessment and do everything we can to support learners to learn to relax as much as possible during testing processes so that they can demonstrate to themselves and others what they have learned. Creative, flexible approaches support learners to get involved in their own assessment, and to see their own progress. We are learning to challenge those who insist on traditional assessment methods, trying to help them to see what is not revealed in these tests, and to value alternative approaches so that learners who might otherwise be unable to demonstrate their learning can gain access to programs that require entry tests.

Voices from the community

"Whenever possible, I move around the room, responding as the learners work, rather than waiting for them to finish before I start marking. My job is to point out explicitly what each one has done correctly, and what evidence I see of good thinking and of learning. My job is also to give learners a chance to articulate what they are doing, which will help them remember and let them take control of the process. ... Marking for confidence is not just empty praise. If I say to a learner, 'Great work!' they may believe that they did great work, but they don't necessarily know what they did that made it great work, or how to do it again. ... The teacher must be specific about exactly what the learner has done successfully and why, so as to encourage them to do it again. It is also important to help them articulate the strategy or skill being used. ... I call it marking for confidence because it looks like marking, and because marking is something the learner expects the teacher to do. But in reality, I turn the marking process into an opportunity for teaching. By focusing on the skills and knowledge the learner has, I create a situation in which we are both interested in working on the material at hand. Out of such situations come the teachable moments."

Kate Nonesuch, author of *Marking for Confidence*

http://www.learningandviolence.net/lrnteach/reflprac/marking_for_confidence.pdf

We ask ourselves, and our colleagues...

- In what ways do we acknowledge that learners are experts whose perceptions should be included in an assessment? How do we document a learner's perceptions in ways that are meaningful for the learner?
- As the learner moves through the learning journey, what techniques and methods have we developed to help learners articulate their own progress? What non-traditional assessment tools do we use (journals, projects, reflections) that help the learner articulate and take control of their own assessment?
- How do we help learners to see the value of 'middle ground' and notice their own incremental progress?
- When assessments are unavoidable, how do we help the learners feel as supported and comfortable as possible?
- How can we advocate for appropriate assessment processes for survivors of violence? Are there ways we can influence other adult learning institutions to become more accessible and sensitive to their needs?

Resources

At www.learningandviolence.net

Nonesuch, K.: Marking for confidence

http://www.learningandviolence.net/lrn/teach/reflprac/marking_for_confidence.pdf

All or nothing (Door 4): Student kit <http://learningandviolence.net/changing.htm>

Celebrate Learning Creative approaches:

<http://www.learningandviolence.net/lrn/teach/materials.htm#learners>

Other links

Battell, E.: Naming the Magic <http://www.nald.ca/library/research/magic/magic.pdf>

"I've Opened Up" – Exploring Learners' Perspectives on Progress

<http://www.nald.ca/library/research/openup/openup.pdf>

In print

Murphy, J. (2008). *Move the body, stretch the mind*. Edmonton: Windsound Learning Society. (section on test taking)

Transitions

During the course of each year many learners will leave our program for different reasons: some learners move on to other opportunities in employment or education, others leave because of personal needs or crises, some simply disappear and we may never know what led them to leave or what happened to them after that. Some leave but return again and again.

How are transitions a violence and learning issue?

Transitions can be very hard for those of us who have experienced violence. Learners who have experienced violence may succumb to self-doubt or anxiety, and may experience many types of crises and personal challenges that make participating in a program impossible. Many simply don't return, perhaps without actually intending to leave. Although funders require us to track learner exits to evaluate our ability to help learners reach their goals, this is not always possible. Keeping in touch with learners as—and after—they leave our programs is more than just a tracking issue: it is also a violence and learning issue. Former learners may be too ashamed to get in touch or respond to program attempts to reach them, or they may have no access to telephones or computers as crisis hits or poverty or danger lead them to hide or move on. When learners have built a trusting relationship with a tutor who leaves the program, some drop out, unable to bear to open up again and learn to trust a new tutor.

For others the connection does not end when learners leave our program, they remain in close touch. They may find changes terrifying and have difficulty leaving a safe environment where they have been encouraged to see themselves anew and have come to believe new learning and change is possible.

Shared understanding and strategies

Some learners who have gone on to higher education or employment return frequently to the community program where they first came to believe themselves capable of taking on this challenge. They look for practical help, but also for encouragement from those they have come to trust, and renewed energy for their challenging new endeavours. We have learned that when community programs serve as a bridge and stable foundation, learners often feel more confident and secure about their abilities and skills to pursue post-secondary education. Learners have often shared with us that they really appreciate being able to turn to people in the program for support and encouragement and to connect with those they trust, who will 'get' them as they transition to a scary post-secondary program.

When learners leave our program due to personal crisis it is also critical to try to reach out to them to assure them that we are concerned about them and that they are always welcome to return. Part of reaching out is ensuring that we have community supports

already in place especially for at-risk learners. To prevent losing touch with learners we can:

- assure learners that leaving the program in no way implies a failure, that it's OK to take a break, and that they are always welcome to return
- have more than one contact number if possible, and keep in touch with learners on a regular basis
- strengthen diverse community contacts and supports

Voices from the community

"When I first joined classes with Parkdale Project Read (PPR) community, my intention was to improve my English and be able to attend the college, but my relationship with Project Read went beyond that. It has become more like a family relationship--the support and encouragement from teachers and tutors in the program made me trust myself and believe that I can make it to college, and reach my goals at the end. Now I am almost at the end of the first year of my college program and I keep in touch with Project Read because this is the place where I found the help I need and access to resources in the community and college. I go when I need help for my homework. I go when my kids need help with their homework. I go when I need help to communicate with government offices. I go when I need someone to talk about personal issues. I go when I need to have fun. I go when I need to go; the community at Project Read cares about me and I care about them; they mean a lot to me. Even after I graduate from my college program, I will stay connected to PPR because I want to give back to the community that I have grown to value and see as my family."

We ask ourselves and our colleagues...

- How can we help learners to understand why they might want to stop attending our program and to feel ok about returning when they can?
- What can we do to build the trust necessary for learners to be honest with us when they are having a hard time and are tempted to quit?
- What strategies does (or could) our program have for checking in with and supporting learners when they are transitioning, or have transitioned, to college and employment?

Resources

At www.learningandviolence.net

Moving on (activity): Janus Gate

<http://www.learningandviolence.net/lrnteach/outlines.htm#workshops>

5. Tapping Into Our Collective Knowledge and Support

In order to sustain a quality community-based literacy program, we need to support and nurture not only our learners but also ourselves as staff, the volunteer tutors, the board of directors, and our relationships with other community members and groups that are important in our learners' lives. In this section we look at how to keep these players and relationships strong, healthy, and mutually supportive.

Staff support

Here we will look at three elements that are important in nurturing a strong paid staff team: professional development and training, teambuilding / teamwork, and taking care of ourselves.

Professional Development

The impacts of violence on learning add new dimensions to the skills, knowledge and awareness that literacy workers need in their practice. Professional development activities can help develop these strengths as well as sparking innovations in the program. But community-based literacy programs are generally under-resourced, so we don't always have easy access to PD. How do we access—or create—this key support for our work?

How is PD a learning and violence issue?

Clearly, training and professional development for staff in any adult literacy program needs to directly address the impacts of violence on learning. Literacy practitioners, administrators, and volunteers may not be aware of the ways past and current violent experiences may impact learners and potential learners, or how our day-to-day practices might support or impede their access to and success in the program. Many of us have experienced violence ourselves, and will need to reflect on and address this as well in order to be effective in helping others. So we need professional development opportunities designed to counteract the impacts of violence on learning and teaching, within and among ourselves, and in the ways we work with learners.

Shared understanding and strategies

If we want to understand how our everyday practices can affect the chances of survivors of violence finding their way into, and thriving in our programs, we need to create and/or take part in training on the issue of violence and learning and make such training available to paid staff, volunteers, and learners. We also need to make sure that training on other issues addresses the ways the impact of violence on learning affects that particular issue. In addition to making sure that ***all*** training directly

addresses violence and learning, we need to recognize that every learning group—educators as much as learners—will include survivors of violence, and to ensure that our PD activities are designed to maximize learning for all. Training offered within other fields, such as courses and conferences for counselors and social service workers, and creative activities such as collage or story telling, may also generate new ideas and insights. We may also set up informal training within a program or network—such as study circles to read a particular text, or watch a thought-provoking video, and discuss the ideas raised.

Voices from the community

“In response to community interest, we have held four study groups over the years where we read and discussed Too Scared To Learn: Women, Violence and Education by Jenny Horsman. We welcome staff, tutors, board and community members to join our monthly meetings to explore and reflect on the impact of violence on our learning and practice. By the fourth series, our personal understanding of the issues had deepened and we had learned a lot about hosting the group and facilitating the discussion. We learned that as individuals we are often drawn but sometimes fatigued by the issue, that we needed to balance heavy discussion with creative expression and moments of laughter. We learned that talking about ourselves and the impact of violence on our own learning (in addition to learners’) led to a richer, more nuanced understanding and enabled us to feel more present and empathetic with each other and with our learners – like a fellow traveler navigating our own challenging learning journey. Also, we learned that the best way to share ownership of the group and build community was to rotate the responsibility for session planning and facilitation among members. I’ve read and discussed the book Too Scared To Learn four times now and I continue to learn and reflect more deeply each time.”

We ask ourselves and our colleagues...

- Are new staff given a comprehensive orientation to the literacy program? Are part-time and temporary staff given an orientation on paid work time?
- Do orientations include a recognition that many learners will have experienced violence and that this may affect their access to the program, their behaviour and their learning in the program?
- Are equity and/or other policies that address systemic injustice included in orientation and training for educators and other staff? Are they presented as a way to address the ways impacts of violence may play out in the program?
- Do orientations and professional development opportunities explore the language used to describe learners, and positive, non-judgmental ways to address concerns that consider learners' experiences of violence, oppression, discrimination and prejudice?

- Are paid staff and volunteers helped to find their own strengths and recognize the ways their own past experiences of violence, oppression, and privilege may shape their interactions with learners, tutors, and colleagues? To reflect on their power and privilege when interacting with learners and others?
- Are there ongoing professional development opportunities for paid staff and volunteers? Do these activities include an acknowledgment of how violence affects learning, and how to address it?
- Are workshops and resources offered regularly that focus on assessing and creating practices which support learning for survivors of violence? If workshops and courses are available, who has access, or is paid to attend them?

Resources

At www.learningandviolence.net

Learning to teach: Reflective practice

<http://www.learningandviolence.net/lrnlearn/reflective.htm>

Learning to teach: Research in practice

<http://www.learningandviolence.net/lrnlearn/research.htm>

Dreams of a different world: Moving Forward

<http://www.learningandviolence.net/dreams/moving.htm>

In print

Horsman, J. (1999/2000). *Too scared to learn: Women, violence and education*.

Toronto: McGilligan Books/ Marwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Teambuilding / Teamwork

Community programs are often informal workplaces as well as complex community learning environments, with a mix of poorly paid, but strongly committed, full and part-time staff, volunteers, and learners. Sometimes we need to build a strong team that includes the entire community, at other times we may need to work on issues that apply only to the paid workers.

How is this a violence and learning issue?

In a community-based literacy program that is committed to challenging violence and creating a strong and equitable learning community, building and maintaining an effective, supportive, and reflective staff team is crucial. A lot of energy can be spent trying to navigate power, politics, safety, job security, gossip, and negativity; and survivors of violence can pick up the tension in the room. As staff members in a

community-based program, we need to know and trust our colleagues, to acknowledge and resolve our conflicts, and to support each other when things are difficult. We also need the backup of the wider community that includes volunteers, learners, and board members.

Shared understandings and strategies

Working in a context where many of the participants are struggling with the impacts of violence in their lives, and where there is a commitment to struggle alongside them, is challenging work. To make it effective and sustainable, we need to be supported by strong teamwork and solid working relationships with our colleagues. At times, we might need some support around violence that we have experienced, witnessed or heard about in our past, or present. We might need to draw on everyone's perspective, or to be gently challenged to become more aware of our own internal 'triggers' and issues. There may be tensions between two or more staff, and systemic oppression and its ongoing impacts might play a role in such tensions.

Being part of a strong, reflective, supportive team can help prevent the burn-out that happens to many literacy workers—which can be seen as one more impact of violence on learning! The positive energy of a cohesive team of healthy workers reflects on the learners, in strong contrast to the personal and systemic violence and isolation they may have experienced. In fact, teambuilding efforts that include learners can also be valuable in healing old wounds and building new skills and self-esteem.

Here are some strategies we've found useful for team-building:

- creating a culture where we work hard to break the silence, name the tensions, and resolve conflicts
- facilitated teambuilding work, including mediation and/or dispute resolution if needed
- modeling community cohesiveness in the program through collaboration and teamwork among staff
- power-sharing: developing ways of including learners and tutors in the 'team'
- setting up learning circles to explore issues and get to know each other better as a team

And here are some questions to prompt personal storytelling in the learning circle:

- What do others need to know about me in order to work with me?
- What is my greatest source of creativity right now?
- What are my greatest moments of courage in my life?
- What feelings do I have most often? How do these emotions benefit me? How do they hurt me?

- What helps me relax and feel comfortable in my body?

Voices from the community

“Carving out the time to tell our personal stories to each other turned out to be transformative. We built trust by sharing our vulnerabilities and getting to know each other at a deeper level. Our feelings softened as people told their stories and we heard about the complexity of people’s lived experience. In response to the question “what brought you into literacy work?” we learned about each other’s values and the source of our commitment to the work. The sharing revealed differences and commonalities and brought us closer together as a team.”

“Uninterrupted time for teambuilding was like a proactive self-care strategy for the team. It was a chance to focus on our relationships with each other and give and receive feedback about our work and communication styles. We learned about ourselves and how we deal with conflict, and created a reflective space to take responsibility for our reactions and responses. The talking stick was an especially useful tool to help us respectfully listen with our hearts and minds, and to have the space to talk until we were done.”

We ask ourselves and our colleagues...

- Does our program have open communication among staff, where we all know what each other is doing?
- What does it take to build and maintain a strong, effective team? How much importance do we give to this? Are there formal processes in place to make sure it doesn’t get lost?
- How do we resolve conflict among the team? How much tension do we allow to build before we address problems? Do we have a formal structure for conflict mediation and dispute resolution? Do all staff really know/agree with how it works? How is it working for us?
- Do we have a strong performance review process so that we can address issues such as burnout without unnecessary delay?
- How do we model harmony, collaboration, and peaceful conflict resolution, and expand the sense of teamwork to include our learners?

Resources

At www.learningandviolence.net

Learning to teach: Outlines and plans

<http://learningandviolence.net/lrnteach/outlines.htm>

Learning to teach: Materials <http://learningandviolence.net/lrnteach/materials.htm>

Learning to teach: I'm too tired: I'm not good at taking care of myself

http://www.learningandviolence.net/makingconnections/making_connections5.pdf

Helping others learn: Click on the book called "Acknowledge violence"

<http://www.learningandviolence.net/helpothr/hlpothers.htm>

Creating a peaceful program: Learning in Peace

http://www.learningandviolence.net/changing/learning_in_peace.pdf

Group activity plus facilitator's guide: Mapping the evidence: Impacts of violence and learning <http://www.learningandviolence.net/impact/handouts/impactexer.pdf>

In print

Lopes, T. & Thomas, B. (2006). *Dancing on live embers: Challenging racism in organizations*. Toronto: Between the Lines.

Taking care of ourselves

In order to work in the challenging context of community literacy, be present to learners' needs and concerns, and avoid burn out, it's important that we are aware of our own needs, and include ourselves in the circle of care.

How is taking care of ourselves a violence and learning issue?

Literacy work often involves learners sharing their personal stories of dealing with great adversities, barriers, violence and trauma. Even when learners don't tell these stories in detail, we bear witness to how the stresses and strains of their lives impact their participation and learning. Over time, hearing distressing stories and witnessing the struggles can become overwhelming and emotionally draining while juggling the daily tasks of operating a literacy program with limited resources. Unless literacy workers learn to set their own boundaries with care, they can be caught up in learners' crises and in problematic attempts to 'rescue'. There may be times when hearing learners' stories of violence will bring up our own pain and trauma, along with feelings of sadness, helplessness or 'burn-out'. This can result in what is called vicarious trauma, and can change the way we do our work. Taking care of ourselves is key to our ability to bring our creative energy to our work over time, avoid burn out and vicarious trauma, and sustain the important work we do.

Shared understandings and strategies

We need to take care of ourselves in ways that help nourish and recharge our emotional batteries. Self-care includes things like building and maintaining a positive relationship with ourselves; tapping into our inner wisdom; respecting our own needs, limits and boundaries; developing personal and professional relationships; and relaxing and renewing our energy. Practitioners talk about how important it is to have

supportive caring relationships in our professional and personal life—it helps us not to feel alone, and sustains our emotional and physical wellbeing.

Self-care, team-building and professional development are interrelated, especially in a community-based literacy program that is explicitly addressing the impacts of violence on learning. A strategy that addresses all three is to hold learning circles where staff openly share their concerns, issues and best practices.

Voices from the community

“When I’m stressed, working too much, trying to get through my to-do list, that’s when I most need to take care of myself but I’m least able to do it. I don’t feel like I have the emotional energy to allow myself the time and space to unwind and self-reflect. I’m in overdrive and I feel like if I stop I’ll collapse. But when I do go to the gym, write in my journal, give myself permission to cry – my breathing changes, my energy shifts and I have a fresher perspective.”

We ask ourselves and our colleagues...

- How does our organization ensure that we have allocated uninterrupted time to connect as a team to share and discuss concerns and issues?
- What are our regular meetings like? In what ways do they help with brainstorming and sharing of ideas and solutions?
- What do we do personally to help take care of ourselves when hearing stories of trauma and violence? What are we doing that helps us connect with ourselves and others?
- How might we ask for help and delegate work tasks?
- What steps are we taking to nurture ourselves - psychologically, physically, emotionally and spiritually? If there are obstacles that presently stand in the way of our maintaining self-care, what can we do to remove them?

Resources

At www.learningandviolence.net

Selfcare: What can I do to take care of myself?

<http://www.learningandviolence.net/takecare.htm>

Selfcare: I’m too tired: I’m not good at taking care of myself

http://www.learningandviolence.net/makingconnections/making_connections5.pdf

Selfcare activity for learners:

<http://www.learningandviolence.net/lrnteach/materials.htm#learners>

Other links

Stewart, S.: Powerful listening <http://www.literaciesoise.ca/story.htm>

Board support: moving beyond tokenism

In any not-for-profit organization, cooperation and communication between the staff and the board of directors is very important; while the board officially determines the vision, mandate, overall strategies and activities of the organization, it's the staff who have the intimate daily experience of the program. This section is about helping board members to learn more about the impacts of violence on their own and others' lives, and building inclusiveness, equity and accessibility into board structures and processes.

How is board support a violence and learning issue?

Board support is a learning and violence issue because depending on a board's composition and practices, it can replicate oppressive and alienating social divisions and class barriers, or support a culture of care, learning, advocacy and power-sharing within the board and the broader organization. If the composition of the board reflects the diversity of the learning population it serves, including a range of adult literacy learners empowered to participate fully, it is in a stronger position to understand and address the impact of violence on learning.

Shared understandings and strategies

Working together on a board requires finding a common ground, a framework for sharing and discussing issues where everyone can speak, be heard, and be part of the decision making process. Creating rich active participation and the space for perspectives grounded in different experiences can support the creation and delivery of literacy programming that is accessible, critical, and learner-centered.

Many literacy organizations have equity policies that support the idea of learners serving on the board. However, we have found that many learner board members have felt alienated and not comfortable to read the minutes or to speak. Finding common ground where learners on the board are no longer "tokens" does require changes in the way the board conducts meetings and captures minutes, moving away from using "traditional" board practices that can alienate and exclude. If board processes are made more open and interactive, and literacy barriers and the impacts of violence on learning and participation are accommodated, learners and others can participate more fully.

Voices from the community

“You think you know a learner. You remember her speaking eloquently in learning groups, her active involvement in group decision making, her judgment, knowledge, spirit. Then you find yourself sitting across from her at a board meeting. She looks distracted. She hardly ever speaks. She is always polite and agreeable. After the meeting, eyes down, she asks you what was decided at the meeting.”

“We know that the physical presence of a learner in a learning group does not ensure that her mind, heart and spirit are present. We have learned to facilitate groups so that learners can become present. But we somehow forget what we have learned when we sit down at board meetings. At board meetings, staff and tutors get pulled into a world of written language, procedures, the conventions of the powerful. We forget lessons that we have learned through our involvement in literacy work. We submit to the world of exclusion and class division that we have undertaken to subvert. In doing this, we leave the learners whom we have undertaken to support alone, their minds, hearts and spirits going somewhere else. We reproduce the violence of social inequity in our own space.”

“I have learned not to feel guilty about the ways in which I enact the social violence that was bred in me. But I have also learned to be alert to it, and change. Board meetings are inherited places of privilege, where I reflexively use my understanding of how meetings have been structured to maneuver, argue, persuade. This is behaviour that is hard to unlearn. It requires collective resolve by a board of directors to structure board meetings more like learning groups, places of listening, mutual learning and respect. It means not fetishizing written language or procedural tradition, embedding principles of accountability into a language and social dynamic that works for everyone on a board of directors. A literacy program committed to principles of anti-violence and social equity is an excellent place to do this difficult work, drawing on successes in learning groups. When we have done this work, a learner will be able to walk from a learning group to a board meeting without leaving herself behind.”

We ask ourselves and our colleagues...

- How can we ensure that learners' voices and concerns are dealt with in ways that move beyond tokenism on committees, the board and community meetings?
- What procedures and outreach are in place to bring in board members that are representative of the diversity of the learning population we serve? What about learners and tutors on the board?
- What processes are in place to ensure that our board meetings are accessible to people who may have literacy, language, or other barriers?
- What do we have in place to help raise board members' awareness of the impacts of violence on learning?
- What opportunities do board members have to get to know the program and build solidarity with other members of the community?

Resources:

At www.learningandviolence.net

Strengthening community on community boards of directors: Moving Beyond Tokenism

<http://www.learningandviolence.net/lrn-teach/reflprac/movingbeyonddtokenism.pdf>

In print

Horsman, J. ((2001). "Why would they listen to me?" Reflections on learner leadership activities. In Pat Campbell (Ed.) *Participatory practices in adult education*. Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Community connections

Literacy programming often requires advocating with learners to ensure that they are able to access the support and resources they need. Connections with community agencies that provide services to our learners and share our concerns about equity issues can help us feel less alone while providing us with opportunities to enhance the work we do in our programs.

How are community connections a violence and learning issue?

Learners whose lives are affected by violence often need community resources beyond what we are able to provide. Long-term experiences of violence impact health and well being on many levels, and systemic violence contributes to many practical problems learners face—such as inadequate housing or homelessness, lack of access to healthy food, addictions and mental health challenges, legal issues, crises and family problems of many forms. Counseling is often much needed to support a chosen journey of learning, healing, and personal change. Yet experiences of violence can lead us to be wary to approach new people or to ask for help, to find bureaucratic processes and waiting lists too daunting, to be cautious about trusting new people, to be skilled at concealing our needs, or caught in old methods of coping that may no longer serve us well.

Shared understandings and strategies

Knowing the challenges many learners face, we have found it really helpful to build connections with the organizations learners are likely to want to access. Developing strong connections to a broad range of agencies and community organizations makes it possible to advocate for learners, provide reliable referrals to the right person, and generally make it more ordinary and less shameful to access community resources. Making a personal connection to another agency, being able to describe the procedure in that agency and give the name of the person to ask for, and finally being available to

follow up and help find alternative supports if that resource does not meet the need fully, can make a huge difference for a learner feeling safe and getting the support they need to move forward with their situation.

We have found it helpful to liaise with agencies that are already connected to specific communities to ensure that we are effective allies. For example, connecting with an African social worker at a local community centre is very important when a majority of learners in our community program are of African descent. These connections can also help us feel less alone when trying to meet our funder's demands while being committed to delivering nurturing learner-centered programming that takes into account the systemic oppressions and barriers many learners face on a daily basis.

Building and fostering solidarity with community agencies and organizations that share a social justice perspective can be powerful opportunities to build alliances and coalitions for social action. We have found it extremely helpful to connect with community partners who are open to discussing and naming how systemic oppressions impact learners' lives.

It is also helpful to share with our partners how this approach to literacy can impact us—emotionally, physically and spiritually. For example, participating in learning circles with community partners or potential partners has helped us feel more hopeful and less alone in finding ways to support survivors of violence in meaningful ways.

Some connections that may be helpful include:

Community supports

- Free legal and health advice
- Support in dealing with social assistance workers
- Mental health and substance use programs
- Programs and shelters that support women and children who experienced or are experiencing violence and abuse
- Recreational groups that serve people who are socially excluded and isolated
- Secondary school resources, such as access to gymnasium
- Distress line / walk in counseling
- Housing programs

Identity-based groups

- Youth, seniors, and *LGBTQQ/2S* groups
- Community college upgrading program
- Community college practicum students

Resource agencies

- Public libraries to share resources
- Local computer companies to volunteer computer training and workshops for learners

Voices from the Community:

"I really appreciated the opportunities to participate in the Festival of Literacies at OISE/UT a few years back. It was an opportunity for literacy practitioners across Toronto and Ontario to meet and discuss literacy issues, ideas and practices. At the same time, it was a great opportunity to share our worries, concerns and joys working in the literacy field. Because the issue of the impact of violence on learning was often named and put into context, it felt good to hear how others cared about these issues. Being able to talk openly about how listening to stories of violence, which at times felt hopeless, was helpful in terms of feeling less alone. Upon reflection, I also found myself learning a lot from listening to my literacy colleagues across Ontario share how this work impacted them. I also found meeting every few months a great opportunity for taking care of myself, as well as wonderful opportunity to share best practices. I found that maintaining connections breaks the silence of unacknowledged pain and struggle. It prevented isolation and increased validation and hope. At the same time, we learned that we had shared commonalities and a passion to work from a social justice perspective. Many of the people I have met at the Festival of Literacies are now part of our program's community connections. We also do tutor training with a number of literacy organizations."

We ask ourselves, and our colleagues...

- What do we hope to gain by forming connections with other agencies that we cannot accomplish or provide internally?
- If we hope to access knowledge in other disciplines, what kinds of knowledge and support are we looking for?
- What are the kinds of community connections our literacy program supports, such as sponsorship, cooperation or collaboration?
- How do fundraising goals impact the type of connections we choose to work with? What criteria do we base our decisions on establishing a connection with an organization (i.e. financial, values-philosophy, etc).
- What kinds of procedures and strategies are used in building and sustaining community connections? How do we involve the board and/or learners and staff in this process?
- How do we want to receive or make referrals to or from other agencies? Does our organization have expertise that other groups could benefit from? If so, what is it?

- How do we collaborate with partners who work in different ways from us? Perhaps they don't understand violence and learning issues and demand formal testing and intake processes. How can we work to mitigate the barriers their approaches set up and advocate for change?

Resources

At www.learningandviolence.net

Making changes: Community Action

<http://learningandviolence.net/violence/community.htm>

Making changes: Global Justice <http://learningandviolence.net/violence/global.htm>

Making the connections: Violence and learning:

If I find out about violence, what should I do?

http://www.learningandviolence.net/makingconnections/making_connections4.pdf

Dealing with crises: Student kit, Teacher's Room, Click on Crisis Book

<http://www.learningandviolence.net/changing.htm>

Glossary

Note: The terms in this glossary have been adapted from various sources, which are listed at the end.

Ableism: The cultural, institutional and individual set of practices and beliefs that assign different (lower) value to people who have developmental, emotional, physical, sensory or health-related disabilities, thereby resulting in differential treatment. Disabilities, invisible or visible, have been redefined in the disabilities studies field as impairments that can have effects on the level and quality of activities that individuals can pursue. Since the 1970s, people with disabilities, and allies, have worked to explain their reality, based on the idea that it is not the actual impairment that limits a person's interaction in the world, but the barriers, both physical and attitudinal, that society constructs around impairments. Academics refer to ideas that support this thinking as the social model of disability.

Ageism: The cultural, institutional and individual set of practices and beliefs that assign different values to people according to their age, thereby resulting in differential treatment.

Acculturation or Cultural Appropriation: The process whereby the culture, values and patterns of the majority are adopted by a person or an ethnic, social, religious, language or national group. This process can also involve absorbing aspects of minority cultures into the majority culture's pattern.

Ally: A member of an oppressor group who works to end a form of oppression that gives her or him privileges. For example, a white person who works to end racism, or a man who works to end sexism.

Anti-Black Racism: Anti-Black racism is the racial prejudice, stereotyping and discrimination that is directed at people of African descent, rooted in their unique history and experience of enslavement. It is manifested in the legacy and racist ideologies that continue to define African descendants' identities and their lives, and places them at the bottom of society and as primary targets of racism. It is manifested in the legacy of the current social, economic, and political marginalization of African Canadians in society such as the lack of opportunities, lower socio-economic status, higher unemployment, significant poverty rates and overrepresentation in the criminal justice system. Anti-Black racism is characterized by particularly virulent and pervasive racial stereotypes. Canadian courts and various Commissions have repeatedly recognized the pervasiveness of anti-Black stereotyping and the fact that African Canadians are the primary targets of racism in Canadian society.

Anti-Oppression: Strategies, theories and actions that challenge socially and historically built inequalities and injustices that are ingrained in our systems and institutions by policies and practices that allow certain groups to dominate over other groups

Anti-Racism/Anti-Racist Education: An active and consistent process of change to eliminate individual, institutional and systemic racism as well as the oppression and injustice racism causes. A perspective that permeates all subject areas and school practices, aimed at the erasing racism in all its various forms.

Anti-Semitism: Latent or overt hostility or hatred directed towards individual Jews or the Jewish people (not to all Semitic peoples), leading to social, economic, institutional, religious, cultural or political discrimination. Anti-Semitism has also been expressed through individual acts of physical violence, vandalism, the organized destruction of entire communities and genocide.

Assimilation: The full adoption by an individual or group, of the culture, values and patterns of a different social, religious, linguistic or national group, resulting in the elimination of attitudinal and behavioural affiliations from the original cultural group. Can be voluntary or forced.

Barrier: An overt or covert obstacle; used in employment equity to mean a systemic obstacle to equal employment opportunities or outcomes; an obstacle which must be overcome for equality to be possible.

Classism: The cultural, institutional and individual set of practices and beliefs that assign value to people according to their socioeconomic status, thereby resulting in differential treatment where certain people are privileged than others.

Charitable Service Providers: Refers to an organization that promotes an approach that looks at learners or clients as charity cases rather than empowered individuals.

Colonialism: Usually refers to the period of European colonization from Columbus (1492) onwards, in the Americas, Asia and Africa. It has taken different forms from settler colonies like Canada, to non-settler colonies such as India during British rule. Colonialism differs also across colonizing nations and across time. For example, French colonialism had different policies from British, while modern colonialism is often referred to as “globalization,” which includes the exploitation of labour and national resources by transnational corporations and the expansion of free trade agreements and blocs.

Convention Refugees: Men, women and children with good reason to fear persecution in their home country because of their race, religion, gender, nationality, political viewpoint, or membership in a particular social group. Their lives are in

danger. If they are lucky enough to escape from their home country, they cannot return to it in safety until the situation changes. Refugees do not leave because they want to, but because they must.

Cultural Group: Members of a group having the same beliefs, behavioural norms, values, language, ways of thinking about and viewing the world.

Disability (also see Ableism): Inborn or assigned characteristics of an individual that affects full participation in educational, social, economic, political, religious, institutional or formal activities of a group, or that may require accommodation to enable full participation. Disability has less to do with the individual and more to do with the "shortcomings in the environment and in many organized activities in society, for example, information, communication and education, which prevent persons with disabilities from participating on equal terms" ([United Nations Economic and Social Council. Backgrounder](#)). Visible disabilities are readily apparent and consequent discrimination or stigma may be more predictable than with invisible disabilities which are not immediately apparent. There are just as many 'invisible' disabilities as there are visible ones. These include mental and emotional illnesses and chronic illnesses such as chronic fatigue, epilepsy, AIDS, diabetes, multiple sclerosis, arthritis, fibromyalgia, learning disabilities, environmental allergies, and others ([United Nations Platform for Action Committee](#)). Persons with disabilities form one of the designated groups in employment equity programs. An important aspect of this definition is voluntary self-identification.

Discrimination: The denial of equal treatment, civil liberties and opportunity to individuals or groups with respect to education, accommodation, health care, employment and access to services, goods and facilities. Behaviour that results from prejudiced attitudes by individuals or institutions, resulting in unequal outcomes for persons who are perceived as different. Differential treatment that may occur on the basis of race, nationality, gender, age, religion, political or ethnic affiliation, sexual orientation, marital or family status, physical, developmental or mental disability. Discrimination also includes the denial of cultural, economic, educational, political and/or social rights of members of non-dominant groups.

Diversity: A term used to encompass all the various differences among people—including race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, disability, socio-economic status, etc.—and commonly used in the United States and increasingly in Canada to describe workplace programs aimed at reducing discrimination and promoting equality of opportunity and outcome for all groups. Concern has been expressed by anti-racism and race relations practitioners that diversity programs may water down efforts to combat racism in all its forms.

Dominant Group (see Majority): Considered the most powerful and privileged of groups in a particular society or context. The dominant group in Canada is white, Christian, heterosexual, male, and English speaking, perceiving themselves to be superior to and more privileged than Aboriginal Peoples, Black People and other people of colour, people of minority religious and linguistic groups, LGBTTTQI2S, and women.

Employment Equity: A program designed to remove barriers to equality in employment by identifying and eliminating discriminatory policies and practices, remedying the effects of past discrimination, and ensuring appropriate representation of the designated groups.

Equal Opportunity Program: An explicit set of policies, guidelines and actions devised to eradicate discriminatory practices and to ensure access to and full participation in educational and employment opportunities, housing, health care, and the services, goods and facilities available to the general community.

Equity: If our concern for equity arises from our sense of fair play and compassion, a definition is still required. Webster's "freedom from bias or favouritism" works well enough, but current notions of equity are much more complex. One way of defining equity is to identify the inequities we hope to eradicate. Two sources of inequity are evident: those arising from the education system's structure and practices, and those arising from the student's ethno-cultural and socioeconomic context. Another way of defining equity is to consider the broad sequential elements comprising education:

- Equity of resources (supports, finances, taxes);
- Equity in process (the school experience, program, content, access);
- Equity of outcomes (learning achieved, impacts on later life).

The list below illustrates the scope of the equity challenge in an educational setting:

- Equity in teacher expectations and behaviours
- Equity in access to good teachers
- Equity in career expectations and career or academic counseling
- Equity with respect to gender
- Equity with respect to sexual orientation
- Equity in access to culturally appropriate learning resources
- Equity in access to appropriate language supports
- Equity in access to programs and resources appropriate to individual abilities, disabilities, interests, talents, gifts, special needs

- Equity in access to technology
- Equity in access to and participation in education governance, policy-making, advisory bodies

(adapted from Arnold Reimer (2005) Equity in Public Education, Manitoba Association of School Superintendants http://www.mass.mb.ca/EquityinPublic_Educ.pdf)

Ethnic Group: Refers to a group of people having a common heritage or ancestry, or a shared historical past, often with identifiable physical, cultural, linguistic and/or religious characteristics

Feminism: Refers to theories, movements and actions that aim to challenge and eliminate sexism.

First Nations: One of the three distinct cultural groups of Aboriginal Peoples. There are 633 First Nations Bands, representing 52 nations or cultural groups, and more than 50 languages. Most individuals prefer to be referred to by their specific nation e.g. Cree, Dene, Blackfoot, etc. (AFN).

Harassment: Persistent, on-going communication (in any form) of negative attitudes, beliefs or actions towards an individual or group, with the intention of disparaging that person(s). Harassment is manifested in name calling, jokes or slurs, graffiti, insults, threats, discourteous treatment, and written or physical abuse. Harassment may be subtle or overt.

Heterosexism: The belief in the inherent superiority of heterosexuality and thereby its right to dominance. An ideological system and patterns of institutionalized oppression which deny, denigrate and stigmatize any non-heterosexual form of behaviour, identity, relationship or community.

Homophobia: Disparaging or hostile attitude or negative bias towards gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender person(s). (See: LGBTTQQI2S). The fear and persecution of queer people, rooted in a desire to maintain the heterosexual social order.

Human Rights: Human rights affirm and protect the right of every individual to live and work without discrimination and harassment. Human Rights policies and legislation attempt to create a climate in which the dignity, worth and rights of all people are respected, regardless of age, ancestry, citizenship, colour, creed (faith), disability, ethnic origin, family status, gender, marital status, place of origin, race, sexual orientation or socio-economic status.

Immigrant: One who moves from his/her native country to another with the intention of settling for the purpose of forging a better life or for better opportunity. This may be for a variety of personal, political, religious, social or economic reasons. The word is

sometimes used incorrectly to refer, implicitly or explicitly, to people of colour or with nondominant ethnicities.

Inclusive Language: The deliberate selection of vocabulary that avoids accidental or implicit exclusion of particular groups and that avoids the use of false generic terms, usually with reference to gender.

Indigenous Peoples: The descendants of the original inhabitants of a land. In Canada/Turtle Island “the term is used to collectively describe three groups of Indigenous people: “Inuit,” “Métis People,” and “First Nations.” These are three separate peoples with unique heritages, languages, cultural practices, and spiritual beliefs, histories and political goals” (Assembly of First Nations).

Institutional Violence: see Systemic Discrimination or Systemic Violence

Intellectual Disability: Characterized by significant limitations both in intellectual functioning (reasoning, learning, problem solving) and in adaptive behaviour, which covers a range of everyday social and practical skills. This disability often originates before the age of 18. This definition is a changing one, adapting to overcome stigmatization.

Internalized Oppression: Patterns of mistreatment of racialized groups and acceptance of the negative stereotypes created by the dominant group become established in their cultures and lock members of racialized groups into roles as victims of oppression.

Intersectionality: The interconnected nature of all forms of oppression (cultural, institutional and social) against particular groups, and the way they are imbedded within existing systems such that they operate in insidious, covert, and compounded ways (e.g., gender and colour; religion and race; sexual orientation and race).

Islamophobia: A term recently coined to refer to expressions of negative stereotypes, bias, or acts of hostility towards followers of Islam or towards individual Muslims.

Learning Disability: The term learning disabilities refers to a number of disorders which may affect the acquisition, organization, retention, understanding, or use of verbal or nonverbal information. Because these disorders affect learning in individuals who otherwise demonstrate at least average abilities essential for thinking and/or reasoning, learning disabilities are distinct from global intellectual deficiency.

Learning disabilities range in severity and may interfere with the acquisition and use of one or more of the following: oral language (e.g., listening, speaking, understanding); reading (e.g., decoding, phonetic knowledge, word recognition, comprehension); written language (e.g., spelling and written expression); and

mathematics (e.g., computation, problem solving). Learning disabilities may also involve difficulties with organizational skills, social perception, social interaction and perspective taking. (Learning Disabilities Association of Canada and Ontario).

LGBTQQI2S: An acronym for the various sub-communities and identities of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender/Transsexual, Queer, Questioning, Intersexed and 2-Spirited people.

Marginalization: With reference to race and culture, the experience of persons who do not speak the majority group's language, cannot find work or gain access to social services and therefore, cannot become full and equal participating members of society. Also refers to the process of being "left out" of or silenced in a social group.

Mental Health/Psychiatric Consumer/Survivor (or person with Mental Health problems): A person who is under treatment for a psychiatric illness or disorder. The term was coined in an attempt to empower those with mental health issues, usually considered a marginalized segment of society. The term suggests that those individuals have a choice in their treatment and that without them there could not exist mental health providers. Today, the word mental health consumer has expanded in the popular usage of consumers themselves to include anyone who has received mental health services in the past. Other terms sometimes used by members of this community for empowerment through positive self-identification include "peers," "people with mental health disabilities," "psychiatric survivors," "ex-patients," and "people labeled with psychiatric disabilities."

Minority Group: Refers to a group of people within a society that is either small in numbers or that has little or no access to social, economic, political or religious power. In Canada, refers to the diverse ethno-racial identities that are not of the dominant white group. In some areas, they are not always in the minority numerically. Minority rights are protected by the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, The Human Rights Acts and Codes, and the UN Convention on the rights of minorities. The term may imply inferior social position. In common use, Racial or Visible Minority describes people who are not White; Ethnic Minority refers to people whose ancestry is not English or Anglo-Saxon; Linguistic Minority refers to people whose first language is not English (or, in Quebec, not French).

Multicultural/Multiracial Education: A broad term which may refer to a set of structured learning activities and curricula designed to create and enhance understanding of and respect for cultural diversity. The term often connotes inclusion of racial, ethnic, religious, linguistic, national, international and political diversity, and is also inclusive of the culture, heritage, history, beliefs and values of the various peoples people within a pluralistic society. Although multicultural/multiracial

education can and should include anti-racism, there has been an increasing recognition of the limitations of this concept because it does not explicitly acknowledge the critical role that racism plays in preventing the achievement of the vision of Multiculturalism, and also because it may promote a static and limited notion of culture as fragmented and confined to ethnicity.

Multiculturalism: Federal policy announced in 1971 and enshrined in law in the Multiculturalism Act of 1988, which acknowledges the unequal access to resources and opportunities of Canadians who are not of the dominant white group, and urges the recognition of their contributions, the preservation of their cultural heritage and the equal treatment of all Canadians. Multiculturalism is the existence within one society or nation of two or more non-homogeneous but equally recognized ethnic, racial, cultural, linguistic or religious groups. Canadian (federal) and Ontario (provincial) policies on multiculturalism ensure this diversity and equal rights for and recognition of all groups. (Although it can and should include anti-racism, there has been an increasing recognition of the limitations of this concept because it does not explicitly acknowledge the critical role that racism plays in preventing the achievement of the vision, and also because it may promote a static and limited notion of culture as fragmented and confined to ethnicity).

Oppression: The unilateral subjugation of one individual or group by a more powerful individual or group, using physical, psychological, social or economic threats or force, and frequently using an explicit ideology to sanction the oppression. Refers also to the injustices suffered by marginalized groups in their everyday interactions with members of the dominant group. The marginalized groups usually lack avenues to express reaction to disrespect, inequality, injustice and lack of response to their situation by individuals and institutions that can make improvements.

Patriarchy: The norms, values, beliefs, structures and systems that grant power, privilege and superiority to men, and thereby marginalize and subordinate women.

People of Colour: A term which applies to all people who are not seen as White by the dominant group, generally used by racialized groups as an alternative to the term visible minority. It emphasizes that skin colour is a key consideration in the “everyday” experiences of their lives. The term is an attempt to describe people with a more positive term than non-White or minority which frames them in the context of the dominant group.

Persons with Disabilities: Refers to persons who identify themselves as experiencing difficulties in carrying out the activities of daily living or experience disadvantage in employment, and who may require some accommodation, because of a long term or recurring physical or developmental condition. (Also see Disability/Ableism)

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD): Is a medical term for a combination of physiological and psychological effects that develop in the aftermath of a traumatic event, such as: war, violence, accident, sexual abuse and earthquake. In cases of major and/or repeated trauma, strong reactions may continue for years, such as overwhelming fear that the world is not a safe place. Often recovery begins with establishing a safe place, a situation within which the survivor can feel some sense of safety and predictability.

Poverty: Canada has no official definition of poverty, no official method of measuring poverty, and no official set of poverty lines. In the absence of any kind of official government-approved methodology the debate over how to measure poverty continues. Technically, the word poverty refers to the state of being poor; lack of the means of providing material needs or comforts, however a closer look at the systemic and institutional impacts of poverty and their disproportionate effect on women, children, older people and those from racialized backgrounds indicates that poverty is much more complex.

Power: That which allows one group to name and classify subordinate groups and to subject them to differential treatment.

Prejudice: A state of mind; a set of attitudes held by one person or group about another, tending to cast the other in an inferior light, despite the absence of legitimate or sufficient evidence; means literally to “pre-judge”; considered irrational and very resistant to change, because concrete evidence that contradicts the prejudice is usually dismissed as exceptional. Frequently prejudices are not recognized as false or unsound assumptions or stereotypes, and, through repetition, become accepted as common sense notions. When backed with power, prejudice results in acts of discrimination and oppression against groups or individuals.

Privilege: The experience of freedoms, rights, benefits, advantages, access and/or opportunities afforded members of the dominant group in a society or in a given context, usually unrecognized and taken for granted by members of the majority group, while the same freedoms, rights, benefits, advantages access and/or opportunities are denied to members of the minority or disadvantaged groups.

Queer: Once a negative term to describe those who did not meet societal norms of sexual behaviour, queer is now used by many LBTTQI2S people as an umbrella term to describe themselves and their various communities.

Race: Refers to a group of people of common ancestry, distinguished from others by physical characteristics such as colour of skin, shape of eyes, hair texture or facial features. (This definition refers to the common usage of the term race when dealing

with human rights matters. It does not reflect the current scientific debate about the validity of phenotypic descriptions of individuals and groups of individuals). The term is also used to designate social categories into which societies divide people according to such characteristics. Race is often confused with ethnicity. Various types of broad-based groups (e.g. racial, ethnic, religious and regional) are rarely mutually exclusive, and the degree of discrimination against any one or more varies from place to place, and over time.

Racism: A mix of prejudice and power leading to domination and exploitation of one group (the dominant or majority group) over another (the non-dominant, minority or racialized group). It asserts that the one group is supreme and superior while the other is inferior. Racism is any individual action, or institutional practice backed by institutional power, which subordinates people because of their colour or ethnicity.

Sexism: Sexism stems from a set of implicit or explicit beliefs, erroneous assumptions, and actions based upon an ideology of inherent superiority of one gender over another and may be evident within organizational or institutional structures or programs, as well as within individual thought or behaviour patterns. Sexism is any act or institutional practice, backed by institutional power, which subordinates people because of gender. While, in principle, sexism may be practiced by either gender, most of our societal institutions are still the domain of men and usually the impact of sexism is experienced by women.

Social Justice: A concept premised upon the belief that each individual and group within society is to be given equal opportunity, fairness, civil liberties and participation in the social, educational, economic, institutional and moral freedoms and responsibilities valued by the society.

Stereotype: A fixed mental picture or image of a group of people, ascribing the same characteristic(s) to all members of the group, regardless of their individual differences. An overgeneralization, in which the information or experience on which the image is based may be true for some of the individual group members, but not for all members. Stereotyping may be based upon misconceptions, incomplete information and/or false generalizations about race, age, ethnic, linguistic, geographical or natural groups, religions, social, marital or family status, physical, developmental or mental attributes, gender or sexual orientation.

Systemic Discrimination (also Systemic Violence): The institutionalization of discrimination through policies and practices which may appear neutral on the surface but which have an exclusionary impact on particular groups, such that various minority groups are discriminated against, intentionally or unintentionally. This occurs in institutions and organizations where the policies, practices and procedures

(e.g., in employment systems, job requirements, hiring practices, promotion procedures, etc.) exclude and/or act as barriers to racialized groups. Systemic discrimination also is the result of some government laws and regulations.

Tolerance: Usually meant as a liberal attitude toward those whose race, religion, nationality, etc. is different from one's own. Since it has the connotation of 'put up with', today the term acceptance is preferred. That is, through anti-racism and equity work we aim to counter intolerance, but to achieve acceptance for all.

Vicarious trauma: Refers to the *cumulative* effect of witnessing or hearing from survivors about their experiences of violence or disaster or struggles with systemic barriers. Over time this process can lead to changes in psychological, physical, and spiritual well-being.

Violence: An attack on the identity and integrity of another person; may be an attack on the body, emotions, mind or spirit.

White Privilege: The term White is used here to refer to people belonging to the dominant group in Canada. This group of people are either largest in number, in a superior social position, or successfully shapes or controls other groups through social, economic, cultural, political, military or religious power. In most parts of Canada, the term refers to White, English-speaking, Christian, middle to upper-income Canadians. This group may also perceive themselves to be superior to and more privileged than Aboriginal Peoples, Black People and other people of colour, people of minority religious and linguistic groups, LGBTTTQQI2S, and women. It is recognized that there are many different people who are "White" but who face discrimination because of their class, gender, ethnicity, religion, age, language, or geographical origin.

Xenophobia: An unreasonable fear or hatred of foreigners or strangers, their cultures and their customs.

Some terms in this Glossary were adapted from the [Canadian Race Relations Foundation Glossary of Terms](#) and the following sources:

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