

A photograph of a sunset over a lake. The sky is filled with vibrant orange and red clouds, with a dark blue mountain range in the background. A small canoe with a person inside is visible on the water in the foreground.

Yukon Literacy Strategy



Yukon Literacy Strategy

Contents

Message from the Minister of Education	3
Message from Yukon First Nation Leadership	3
Message from the Literacy Strategy Working Group	4
Executive Summary.....	5
Part One: Literacy in Yukon.....	7
Introduction	7
Why is Literacy Important?.....	7
How was the Strategy Developed?	9
What is the Definition of Literacy in Yukon?	12
What are the Challenges and Opportunities? The Literacy Context in Yukon	16
Part Two: <i>Yukon Literacy Strategy</i>	24
Vision.....	24
Goal	24
Objectives	24
Outcomes.....	25
Implementation, Monitoring, and Evaluation of the Strategy	26
Conclusion.....	28
Bibliography	29
Appendix 1	31

YUKON LITERACY STRATEGY

Message from the Minister of Education

Include a commitment statement on behalf of the Minister of Education to the group for their work on the Strategy.

Message from Yukon First Nation Leadership

Include a thank you and stress the importance of literacy.

Message from the Literacy Strategy Working Group

The Yukon Literacy Strategy Working Group is pleased to present the *Yukon Literacy Strategy* (the “Strategy”). The Strategy will guide our collective actions over the next ten years and increase the literacy skills of Yukoners. This Strategy was developed alongside the draft Yukon First Nation Literacy Framework and fully respects the unique First Nation philosophies, definitions, goals and outcomes embedded within the framework document.¹

The literacy skills we acquire throughout our lives impact our everyday activities. Literacy affects our quality of life at home, school, work, and on the land and the water. Literacy is in everything we do: from harvesting to grocery shopping; from filling meat caches to banking; to reading and telling stories to our children; and from caring for our land, water and animals to keeping up with changing technology.

Strong literacy skills create stronger individuals, families, clans and communities. These skills are dynamic, complex, and are closely linked with language and culture. Literacy challenges vary by region and are particularly pronounced in our rural and Yukon First Nation communities.

For Yukon First Nations, this challenge is further complicated by the vulnerable state of all Yukon First Nation languages. First Nations iterate that language and culture are intertwined and inseparable as is reflected in the Yukon First Nation Literacy Framework. Emma Sam, Teslin Tlingit Elder puts it eloquently stating: “*our language is who we are.*”

The inter-cultural, holistic and life-long approach to literacy in the Strategy reflects these realities.

We encourage you to join us in the implementation of the Strategy. Together, we are committed to increasing the skills of everyone from infants to elders. Together we are committed to ensuring Yukoners have the literacy skills they need to succeed, in their own lives and on their own terms.

Together, we can create a *culture of literacy* and a highly literate Yukon.

List of Signatories to the Yukon Literacy Strategy

¹ Council of Yukon First Nations. *Yukon First Nation Literacy Framework Workshop: Working Together, Moving Forward*, 2014.

Executive Summary

The *Yukon Literacy Strategy* (the “Strategy”) represents the collaborative efforts of literacy stakeholders and diverse community groups, inclusive of the First Nations Education Commission and participating First Nation governments, across the territory and presents an overall framework for achieving our mutual goal of improving the literacy skills of Yukoners.

This document recognizes the life-long continuum of learning and sets strategic direction for the next ten years to address the literacy needs of individuals from early childhood, school age, and through to adulthood.

The Strategy highlights some of the current research around the importance and benefits of increased literacy skills for individuals, families, clans and communities. It explains why a strategic and multi-stakeholder process was seen as the most effective methodology for the creation and implementation of the Strategy.

The context and some of the challenges and opportunities within Yukon are then described. The Yukon Literacy Strategy Working Group knows that literacy represents a wide variety of skills that have impacts throughout our lives. With this premise, the goal of the Strategy is that:

“Yukoners embrace life-long learning and have the literacy skills they need to succeed on their own terms at school, at work, within their families and clans, and as members of diverse communities.”

In order to meet this goal, partners will work on the following objectives:

1. Awareness: Increase understanding of literacy and its importance to all Yukoners.
2. Opportunity and Achievement: Provide a variety of equitable, accessible and innovative programs to support people in achieving a desirable standard of literacy.
3. Quality: Ensure programs meet quality and cultural standards.
4. Partnerships: Build and maintain coordination and partnerships among literacy stakeholders.
5. Language Fluency and Cultural Competency: Provide a variety of accessible and innovative programs to support and strengthen First Nation language fluency development and cultural literacy that are grounded in traditional law and land-based learning opportunities that teach respect for self, others, land and water.

The Strategy is accompanied by the *Action Plan for Literacy*, a working document that outlines the projects and activities through which our objectives will be met. All participants will take responsibility for the implementation of the Strategy and for the monitoring and evaluation of the outcomes. Where First Nations learners and students are involved, culturally appropriate protocols and processes will be paramount.

Part One: Literacy in Yukon

Introduction

The *Yukon Literacy Strategy* represents the collaborative efforts of literacy stakeholders and participating Yukon First Nation governments across the territory. The Strategy presents an overall framework for achieving our mutual goal of improving the literacy skills of Yukoners. This document recognizes the life-long continuum of learning and sets strategic direction for addressing the literacy needs of individuals from early childhood, school age, and through adulthood.

The 2015 *Yukon Literacy Strategy* builds on the 2001 *Yukon Literacy Strategy* and reflects the experience and knowledge of current partners. It takes into account new information and research, changing technology, and new challenges in the field of literacy.

In Yukon, life-long literacy encompasses a wide set of skills and competencies within differing social and cultural contexts that are necessary for an individual to participate confidently and fully as a citizen in a changing society.

Why is Literacy Important?

Research has shown that literacy has a powerful effect on a wide variety of education, social, health, and economic outcomes. Strong literacy and essential skills² contribute to a higher quality of life for Yukon individuals and their families and help to create healthy and flourishing Yukon communities.

Higher levels of skills ensure greater successes in education and training, more positive health outcomes, greater access to labour market opportunities, higher job retention and promotion rates, higher incomes and greater civic involvement.

² The Essential Skills as identified by Employment and Social Development Canada are: Reading, Writing, Document Use, Numeracy, Computer Use, Thinking, Oral Communication, Working with Others and Continuous Learning.

Acquiring literacy skills begins early in life. For First Nations people, it is known that when you speak and sing to babies when they are still in the womb that they can hear you. Current language development research supports this practice as well.³ Parents, caregivers, family and clan members are a child's first literacy teachers, from whom language and culture are learned. Families, parents and caregivers demonstrate to children the meaningful and everyday uses of reading, writing and numeracy.⁴ Clans and families strengthen a child's sense of identity, sense of belonging and well-being through the communication of their cultural and linguistic heritage. Cultural heritage includes people's histories, worldviews, stories, laws, practices, traditions and beliefs. It is critical that personal and cultural foundations are developed and nurtured, given how these foundations correlate with the achievement of one's full potential in life.

In all families, early childhood experiences with literacy contribute greatly to a child's developmental foundations of literacy and have life-long implications.

"Participation in family literacy is strongly linked to scholastic achievement among children and to adults' success in finding and keeping employment."¹ Canadian Literacy and Learning Network Fact Sheet on Families, 2012

Labour market outcomes in particular have been well researched with findings that "a higher proportion of better-skilled adults translate into increased overall rates of productivity growth"⁵ and by extension, improved per capita income and quality of life. "Literacy is a key factor in determining an individual's labour market outcomes and illustrates the opportunities for individuals, businesses and governments when investing in upskilling Canada's workforce."⁶ Employees with higher levels of literacy and essential skills have a positive impact on the

³ Prenatal language acquisition has increasingly become popularised since the 1980s upon the scientific discovery of fetal response to sound. (See DeCasper and Fifer, 1980.) There has since been a plethora of research on the topic of external influences (such as music) to fetal brain development

⁴ Canadian Literacy and Learning Network Fact Sheet on Families, 2012.

⁵ *State of the Literacy and Essential Skills Field: the 2012 Pan-Canadian Report*, Canadian Literacy and Learning Network, page 10.

⁶ *State of the Literacy and Essential Skills Field: the 2012 Pan-Canadian Report*, Canadian Literacy and Learning Network, page 11.

workplace in a variety of ways, including lower turnover rates and absenteeism, higher motivation and productivity, and fewer on-the-job accidents.⁷

Literacy is also important for health outcomes. An individual's level of literacy directly affects his or her ability "to obtain information, comprehend its significance, and assess its relevance," not only for their own health, but also for that of their family and community.⁸

Changing technology and its rapid integration into school, work and private life has meant that new kinds of literacy skills are required. Online banking, social media management, website navigation and digital writing, research and communication are but some of the examples of how literacy and digital skills are embedded into daily life.

How was the Strategy Developed?

The Strategy was developed using a multi-stakeholder and consensus-driven process. The Yukon Literacy Strategy Working Group was formed following the New Horizons Education Summit: A Focus on Literacy in December 2012. Representatives from Government of Yukon, First Nation governments, literacy organizations, early learning, K-12 and post-secondary educational institutions, businesses and industry associations were invited to participate. The process enabled participants to jointly develop the Strategy.

"Literacy and Essential Skills training needs to be holistic and recognize the importance of First Nations, Metis and Inuit languages and traditions and the cross-cultural diversity within Native communities." State of the Literacy and Essential Skills Field, page 54, *Canadian Literacy and Learning Network*.

There are many benefits to taking a strategic and multi-stakeholder approach. During the process, relationships were enhanced among members of the broader literacy community and

⁷ *State of the Literacy and Essential Skills Field: the 2012 Pan-Canadian Report*, Canadian Literacy and Learning Network, page 99.

⁸ *An Inter-Sectoral Approach for Improving Health Literacy for Canadians: A Discussion Paper*, Public Health Association of British Columbia, 2012, page 17.

a greater understanding of the work of others was developed. There was also an opportunity to mutually increase understanding of literacy issues in Yukon and jointly develop solutions to address those issues. The Strategy will function as a planning tool over the next ten years that will support partners to better coordinate effective and efficient literacy programming and services.

Two principles were integral in the development of the strategy, and these will continue to be important in its implementation: the role of research and the importance of cultural awareness and context.

There is a large body of research on all aspects of literacy and literacy programming in Canada and internationally, alongside several studies that include Yukon-specific data. Some of these sources are referenced in this document. Research has been drawn upon to ensure that literacy planning for the territory is grounded in current information, best practices, and in the needs and successes of learners. This approach, together with local knowledge about existing and emerging needs, helps to ensure programs and activities can be targeted to achieve positive and measurable outcomes.

Cultural awareness and context are important principles within the strategy. A number of languages and cultural populations exist in Yukon, including Yukon First Nations, Francophones, and a growing immigrant population. Ensuring programming is relevant and contextual to these cultural and linguistic realities, while acknowledging and addressing the specific needs of these populations, is important to ensuring continued success.

Working with Yukon First Nations

There are fourteen Yukon First Nations, eleven of which have self-government and land claims agreements. The self-governing First Nations have similar powers to the territorial/provincial governments. For example, these First Nations can enact legislation for their lands, resources, education, health, and justice. In the development of the Strategy, this meant that extra care had to be taken to ensure protocols were followed acknowledging the government-to-government relationship between the Yukon government and the Yukon First Nation governments. By working with the First Nation Education Commission (FNEC), which represents thirteen Yukon First Nations, and with Kwanlin Dün First Nation (not represented by FNEC), the Yukon Literacy Strategy Working Group was able to ensure Yukon First Nation issues were defined and captured in the *Strategy*.

All participants in the development of the strategy acknowledged the special attention that had to be given to address the challenges faced by Yukon First Nations. Two key areas were identified of greatest concern: the survival of Yukon First Nation languages, and improving Yukon First Nation literacy outcomes in Canada's official languages.

Yukon First Nation Languages

There are eight different Yukon First Nation languages distributed amongst the fourteen First Nation communities. These languages are nearing extinction. One of the major reasons for this crisis is that for decades First Nations children in Yukon were forced into residential schools by the Canadian government. The children were not permitted to speak their language as the government sought to assimilate Yukon First Nation people into mainstream society.

Great efforts must be undertaken to save Yukon First Nation languages from extinction. In the context of there being fewer and fewer highly fluent speakers of Yukon First Nation languages, there is an immediate need to address the issue.

If the issue is not addressed, not only will Yukon First Nation languages be lost, the cultural identity and diversity of these communities will also be lost. This loss would result in a loss of diverse values, skills, attitudes, and experiences that bring different ideas and perspectives to Yukon society.

Yukon First Nation Literacy Outcomes

The 2012 Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) survey identifies a large gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal scores in Yukon, with the Aboriginal population scoring consistently lower. (These scores were based on surveys conducted in Canada's official languages: English and French.) However, the survey also points out that when educational attainment is the same, "results suggest that differences in proficiency between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal populations are all but eliminated at higher levels of education."⁹ There is a need for Yukon First Nation people to achieve increased educational attainment if they are to reach the same literacy levels as their non-Aboriginal counterparts.

⁹ Statistics Canada. Skills in Canada: First Results from the Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC). 2013, page 46.

What is the Definition of Literacy in Yukon?

The meaning of literacy in Yukon is similar to literacy elsewhere in Canada and the world. In recognition of this, we support the following definition of literacy, developed by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization in 2003 (UNESCO):

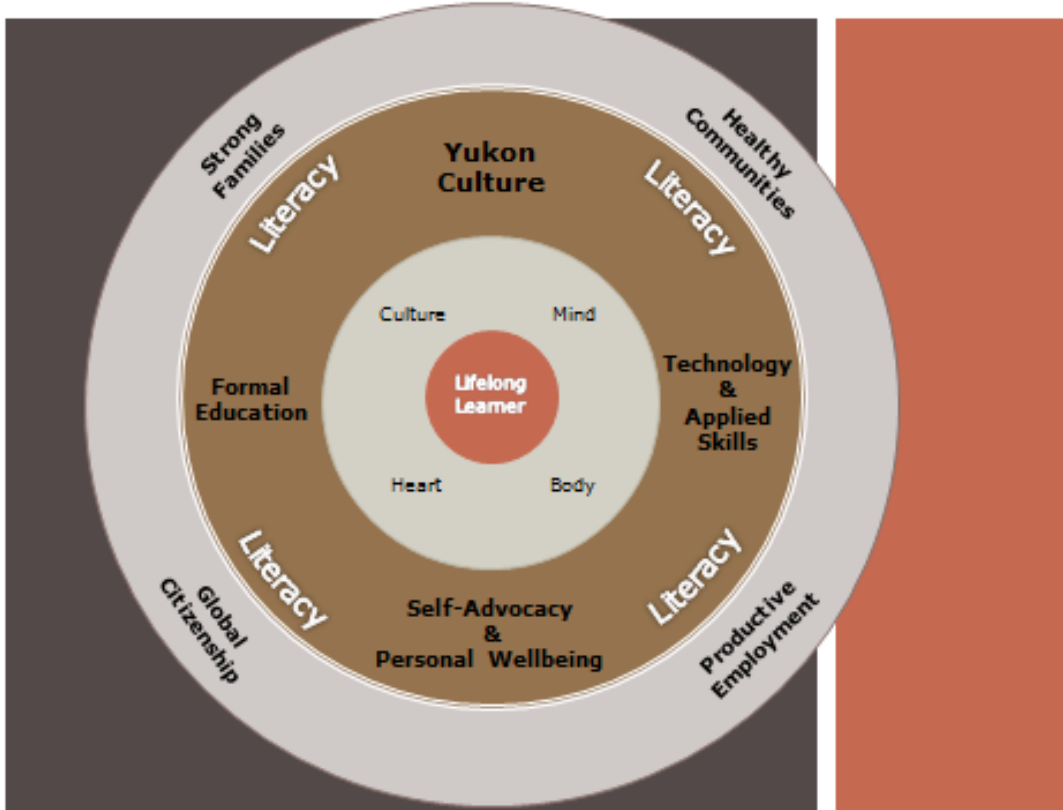
Literacy is the ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate and compute, using printed and written materials associated with varying contexts. Literacy involves a continuum of learning in enabling individuals to achieve their goals, to develop their knowledge and potential, and to participate fully in their community and wider society.

This definition is widely accepted and is the one used by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), Program for International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC), the Council of Ministers of Education Canada (CMEC), and by Public Schools Branch of Yukon Education.

In addition to the above, literacy in Yukon is also context and culturally dependent. The Yukon Literacy Strategy Working Group developed the following definition and diagram to address the interests of Yukon literacy stakeholders and to highlight what literacy means in many contexts.

In Yukon, life-long literacy encompasses a wide set of skills and competencies within differing social and cultural contexts that are necessary for an individual to participate confidently and fully as a citizen in a changing society.

Diagram: Yukon Literacy Wheel



The following paragraphs describe the literacy wheel.

At the centre of the wheel is the individual: the **lifelong learner**. The next centre ring describes the make-up of the individual and the parts of themselves that identify who they are and can be used to strengthen their intellectual (**mind**), physical (**body**), emotional (**heart**), and **cultural** selves. In this way, multiple literacies can be developed through a variety of means, which enables greater potential for contributions to community and society.

The third literacy ring shows the different ways by which life-long learners can develop multiple literacies, skills, and competencies that are needed in today's world. These areas are not mutually exclusive and similar skills can be developed in a variety of ways, but they represent common means through which people acquire literacy. Both formal and informal methods of learning are recognized and each is considered indispensable to literacy and essential skill development.

Informally, literacy skills are learned through the development of **self-advocacy and personal well-being**, and can include skills learned in the workplace, life skills, health literacy skills, and the skills needed for creating individual resiliency and self-determination. Literacies are also

developed through the learning of **Yukon culture**, which shapes an individual's day to day context and includes literacies within family and community. This includes First Nations' cultures and languages, as well as English and French.

Multiculturalism in Yukon plays an important role in the kinds of literacies learned, and the methods by which they are learned. For example, literacies and associated skills can be learned through fine arts such as carving, drama and dance, or through land-based learning in such areas as biology and traditional knowledge.

Formal education contributes to fundamental skills such as language development, reading, writing and numeracy, as well as broader developments through arts, sciences, and cultural studies. **Technology and applied skills** includes numeracy, financial literacy, the use of technology leading to digital literacy, and the development of many essential skills through experiential and applied learning.

The outer ring shows the significant implications of literate Yukon citizens and how literacy's reach goes beyond the individual. Strong literacy skills contribute to **strong families, healthy communities, productive employment**, and a broader **global citizenship**. No person is an island, and we all affect each other in these aspects of service to others. These contributions range from subtle examples such as reading to grandchildren or helping a neighbour, to more obvious examples such as organizing community events or involvement in social change.

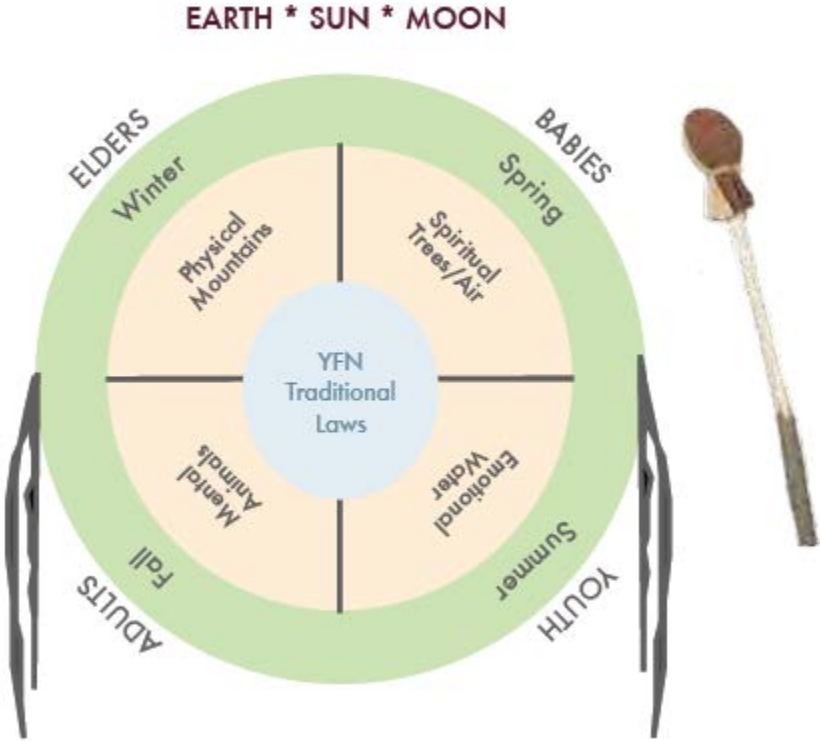
Yukon First Nation Definition of Literacy

Yukon First Nation definitions of literacy incorporate the language of communication and uniquely encompass their collective identity such as their worldviews, languages, stories, laws and practices. There are eight First Nation languages in Yukon and these are:

- Southern Tutchone
- Northern Tutchone
- Hän
- Gwitch'in
- Kaska
- Tagish
- Upper Tanana
- Tlingit

With each Yukon First Nation language group and community, the definitions of literacy have common elements, yet each has unique aspects relative to that specific community. It is imperative that the Yukon First Nation concepts are foundational to any literacy framework or definition of literacy applied to their community or people. See Appendix 2 for examples of

First Nation perspectives on literacy.¹⁰ Yukon First Nations came together in January 2014, at a Literacy Framework Workshop and during the year they held additional meetings to develop the Yukon First Nation Literacy Framework. This Framework uses the following diagram: A consolidation of Yukon First Nations worldviews as concerns literacy. The diagram remains general, capturing common features, yet allowing for the multiple interpretations and representations respecting the diverse cultures and languages that comprise Yukon First Nations. The diagram is anticipated to evolve as discussions among Yukon First Nations continue, but it well illustrates the seed of current thought.



¹⁰ Council of Yukon First Nations. *Yukon First Nation Literacy Framework Workshop: Working Together, Moving Forward*, 2014.

What are the Challenges and Opportunities? The Literacy Context in Yukon

The 2012 literacy survey, Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies, shows that, overall, Yukon is on par with the Canadian and international averages in the three main skill areas or domains measured in the survey: literacy, numeracy and problem-solving in a technology-rich environment.

However, it is important to go beneath the surface of these figures to fully understand the literacy context in Yukon.

Context

Early Years Learners

Literacy in the early years refers to skills developed in the pre-school years that will later be drawn upon when learning to read, write and use numbers. Through activities like talking, singing, playing and reading, parents and other care providers, particularly those in a child's home environment, have the greatest influence over the development of these skills. Parents, extended family, clans and care providers are vital in this age group for creating safe and nurturing environments conducive to learning.

Given the threat of extinction faced by Yukon First Nation languages, some First Nations have started First Nation language immersion programs for pre-schoolers. The goal of such programs is for children to be able to speak and understand their First Nation language upon entry to kindergarten, with at least communicative proficiency.

School-Age Learners

Learners in the school-age years are largely served through the public school system, of which literacy is a crucial and integrated component of programming. (A small proportion of the school-age population is home-schooled by parents or others.)

Similar to learners in the early years, parents, clans, extended family and care providers of this age group continue to play a vital role in setting the stage for literacy and skill development, facilitating learners' connections to school, and thereby improving success.

Alternative forms of education and literacy programs, experiential on-the-land programs, and a variety of youth opportunities are also important, to ensure the needs of this young population are being met. A proportion of the school-age population is home-schooled by parents or others and may have specific needs.

Yukon First Nation language training is offered in 21 of the 28 schools in Yukon as second language programs. However, history indicates that the programs have not produced communicative language proficiency. Many Yukon First Nations have expressed the need for language programs that reflect local language goals; in most cases First Nations are calling for programs that produce higher levels of language proficiency upon graduation. Some First Nations have expressed the need for immersion and bi-lingual language programs. Although Yukon First Nations need to guide the way in the area of school-age language programming, a joint effort is required by all governments in order to achieve success.

Adult Learners

Adult learners are a diverse and complex group with many responsibilities and different histories, strengths, and needs. Adults have many skills learned through life experiences and are representative of a highly literate and active population. They are often eager to share valuable knowledge, have many responsibilities, and are practical in their approach to learning.¹¹

The literacy skills needed throughout an individual's life changes over time; adaptation is required for new language needs, situations and skills need to be maintained through regular use to prevent loss. "Learning needs to be life-long, no matter a person's education level and achievement, in order to cope with today's society and to prevent skills from being lost from lack of use."¹² Increased literacy skills may be needed for a variety of purposes, from helping children and family members, to being fully functional in one's ancestral language, to adapting to new and changing technologies, or increasing employment productivity, or for increasing access to employment opportunities.

Workplace education helps provide a foundation for lifelong learning both inside and outside of the work environment.¹³ Literacy and Essential Skills are at the core of this.¹⁴ Improving work-related skills helps create a more productive workforce, a more competitive economy, and an improved bottom line for businesses.

¹¹ Canadian Literacy and Learning Network. Principles of Adult Learning: Seven Principles of Adult Learning (2015). <http://www.literacy.ca/professionals/professional-development-2/principles-of-adult-learning/>

¹² *State of the Literacy and Essential Skills Field: the 2012 Pan-Canadian Report*, Canadian Literacy and Learning Network 2012, page 7.

¹³ [ABC Life Literacy Canada. Workplace Literacy, 2015.](#)

¹⁴ [ABC Life Literacy Canada. Workplace Literacy, 2015.](#)

Young adulthood is a time when people should begin to engage in the workforce, post-secondary school, and start families. Unfortunately, many young adults with low literacy skills have not learned the basic strategies to use and understand text, to communicate their ideas in writing, to apply math in real life situations, or to comprehend advanced concepts such as probability and financial information. For those who struggle with basic literacy skills as they get older, the need to address self-confidence and motivation becomes a critical factor in their success.¹⁵

Seniors and Elders often have the capacity and the desire, along with the time and interest, to learn new skills at an advanced age.¹⁶ Learning keeps mental capacities strong and enhances health and a sense of well-being. This is why many seniors continue to participate in the workforce. Given the demographic trend of an aging population in Canada, seniors represent an under-utilized resource in the labour market who should be encouraged to stay employed or volunteer, and learn new skills, as needed.

Everyday life puts increasing literacy demands on seniors and Elders, and often places them at a disadvantage.¹⁷ Less literate seniors have more difficulty maintaining their own health, safety, independence, self-esteem, and have more challenges with poverty and isolation.¹⁸ Today's seniors grew up in a very different world where their schooling was cut short by poverty, war, the Depression, or the lure of good jobs that did not require high literacy or numeracy skills. Even for those who finished high school, the education they received may not have prepared them for the demands of today's society. On the other hand, many seniors and Elders are unable to stop work entirely due to economic, psychological or other reasons; in this context, the proportion of Canadian seniors aged 65 or older in the workforce will likely keep rising in the foreseeable future.¹⁹

First Nation Learners

First Nations learning and teachings focus on language fluency and cultural competency grounded in traditional law and land-based learning opportunities that teach respect for self, others, land and water. Learning is a social activity that is influenced by the environment inside

¹⁵ [National Centre on Education and the Economy. *What State and Local Leaders Need to Know about Improving Literacy Skills for Out of School Youth*, 2004.](#)

¹⁶ Shohet, L. Literacy Across the Curriculum: Focus. *Seniors and Literacy*, 2004.

¹⁷ <http://decoda.ca/wp-content/uploads/seniors.pdf> Literacy BC. *Literacy and Seniors*, 2005.

¹⁸ [Literacy BC. *Literacy and Seniors*, 2005.](#)

¹⁹ [Duchesne, D. *More Seniors at Work*. Statistics Canada: Perspectives on Labour and Income, 2004.](#)

and outside the school and the academic, social, emotional and cultural capacity of the learner to engage in the process. Elders are our teachers and we learn together through stories. All cultures need each other and all learners should learn both traditional and non-traditional ways whereby all students succeed with a foot in both worlds.²⁰ The whole Yukon is our school and we learn from our surroundings. Courses about the land must be taught on the land, not just in the classroom.²¹

“The imposition of the residential school system, combined with prohibitions regarding the practice of traditional ceremonies and Aboriginal languages, the loss of traditional lands and reduced access to resources, have taken their toll on the health and well-being of First Nations, Inuit and Metis”. Canada, Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples*, Vol. 3 (Ottawa: Canada communications Group, 1996).

Challenges

The Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) survey identifies a number of areas of concern. While Yukon placed high in a number of areas, this must not obscure the differences between groups within Yukon, and the need to focus efforts on those who have the poorest skills, experience the most barriers, and have the least opportunity to improve their literacy. For example, PIAAC found that:

- Yukon’s youth ages 16-24 scored lower than the Canadian and international youth averages in literacy and numeracy.
- The territory has a higher than average number of respondents at the lowest levels in the areas the survey the measured.

²⁰ Council of Yukon First Nations. *Yukon First Nation Literacy Framework Workshop: Working Together, Moving Forward*, 2014.

²¹ Council for Yukon Indians. *Together Today For Our Children Tomorrow*, 1977.

- There is a large gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal scores, with the Aboriginal population scoring consistently lower.

The causes of these outcomes are diverse and complex, but a number of these challenges have been identified by literacy funders and service providers and can be considered in program and policy design.

A primary challenge facing skill development in Yukon is the current state of inequity between urban Whitehorse and rural communities. Many organizations struggle to provide services and have a consistent presence in smaller communities. Small communities struggle with a lack of resources and an overburdened volunteer base. The needs in communities are different from the needs in Whitehorse, and are different again from one community to another. All of the challenges discussed in this section are exacerbated by the challenge of service provision in the communities.

Ensuring children have the foundational skills needed to succeed when entering kindergarten is another challenge. In 2012, approximately 45 percent of Yukon children evaluated for language comprehension skills were flagged for further intervention and investigation.²² Further, ensuring that children in Grade 4 are sufficiently skilled so that they can transition from “learning to read” to “reading to learn” is a significant milestone in their education and is strongly correlated to high school graduation.

School attendance and engagement are issues for many school-age students. While there are many factors involved, parental and community support throughout the school years is crucial to the success of children.

The survival and revitalization of the eight Yukon First Nation languages are critical issues. First Nation languages are strongly linked with cultural and traditional aspects of literacy. The Council of Yukon First Nation’s *Literacy Framework* emphasizes that, for Yukon First Nations, literacy *is* language and culture, and that the skills of literacy are tightly connected to First Nations’ sense of self and identity within their own First Nation.

Similarly, Yukon’s Francophone population is challenged to maintain French language and culture in a predominantly English environment. Further obstacles to full engagement, both for Francophone and immigrant populations, may include literacy issues due to varying abilities to use English as a second language.

²² Yukon Education

“Immigrants often need to continue language training once they have jobs, even when they have high levels of first language literacy. They also need to become familiar with cultural norms in the workplace.” *State of the Literacy and Essential Skills Field*, page 62, Canadian Literacy and Learning Network.

To ensure everyone has opportunities to achieve their greatest potential, systems and resources must be in place for people with disabilities, learning difficulties and other vulnerabilities. This may include: appropriately intensive supports for students with learning challenges, differentiated instruction in schools and training programs, universally accessible infrastructure and resources, and alternative opportunities for employment and skills development.

Opportunities

While there are significant literacy challenges in the territory, there are also opportunities, particularly through the wide variety of stakeholders involved in literacy activities. These stakeholders have initiatives for a variety of learners and their needs including children, youth, families, and adults, and in a wide variety of settings. Families and individuals, non-profit organizations, all levels of governments, employers and businesses all play an important part in literacy and skill development. With so many committed partners within a small jurisdiction, we have the potential for significant accomplishments.

Local and national data related to literacy in Yukon is available.²³ Research and assessments ensure we have the information we need to move forward and benefit the target population.

²³ Yukon specific tools include the following:

EYE (Early Years Evaluation): The EYE survey measures development and is given to kindergarten students on an individual basis specifically to determine if there is a need for early intervention or extra support. It assesses five domains of early learning closely associated with their readiness to learn to read: Awareness of Self and

The excellent assessment resources that are available for students in the public school system also have the potential to enhance the selection and ongoing development of assessment tools for adult learners.

The early years of life offer an opportunity at a critical stage to establish and build on literacy in all environments. We know that many preschoolers are primarily in their home environment, while others attend some form of child care. Both environments offer opportunities to connect with children and build literacy skills, with far-reaching and life-long outcomes.

Family literacy is a further opportunity for both pre-school and school-age children and their families to improve their learning outcomes. Family literacy offers a model that can meaningfully engage parents and caregivers as partners in their children's education, help children succeed in school, while also addressing adult literacy needs at the same time.

“When parents are not equipped to actively engage with the school system, there are high dropout rates among their children.”¹ CLLN Fact Sheet on Poverty 2012 www.literacy.ca

Changing digital technology, while creating its own learning challenges, also has the potential to create new learning methodologies, as well as global learning connections. In the context of rural Yukon especially, digital technology may provide additional or alternative learning opportunities.

Environment; Social Skills and Approaches to Learning; Cognitive Skills; Language and Communication; and, Physical Development.

Boehm Kindergarten Screen: The Boehm assesses student understanding of 50 basic concepts most frequently used by Kindergarten teachers to measure language comprehension skills and identify children who may be at risk in their learning.

Foundational Skills Assessments in grades 4 and 7 measuring reading, writing and numeracy.

Literacy and essential skills learning in the workplace is an emerging area of practice. Workplace learning provides a foundation for both employee skill development and achievement of business goals, and is a potential area of opportunity for new programming and learning.

In the Yukon, there is widespread acknowledgement that Yukon First Nation languages are near extinction and a major effort has to be made to ensure the languages will live into the future. This awareness creates the opportunity to help bring people together to align efforts to reverse the loss of Yukon First Nation languages in Yukon.

Part Two: *Yukon Literacy Strategy*

After discussion of the context, challenges, and opportunities, the Yukon Literacy Strategy Working Group developed the vision, goal and objectives of the *Yukon Literacy Strategy*. These elements represent an overall framework for improving the literacy skills of Yukoners and will guide the implementation of the Strategy.

Vision

Yukon's vision is an enduring culture of literacy, including Yukon First Nation languages and cultures.

This simple statement captures many themes that emerged in the development of the Strategy. Most important is that literacy is vital for all, through all stages of life, and should be reflected daily at home, at school, at work and in the community. The *Yukon Literacy Strategy* is intended to promote literacy as a strong part of the culture of the territory, and ensure that culture, in all its forms, includes literacy.

Goal

Yukoners embrace life-long learning and have the literacy skills they need to succeed on their own terms at school, at work, within their families and as members of diverse communities.

Objectives

1. Awareness – Increase understanding of literacy and its importance to all Yukoners.
2. Opportunity and Achievement – Provide a variety of equitable, accessible and innovative programs to support people in achieving a desirable standard of literacy.
3. Quality – Ensure programs meet quality and cultural standards.
4. Partnerships – Build and maintain coordination and partnerships amongst literacy stakeholders.
5. Language Fluency and Cultural Competency – Provide a variety of accessible and innovative programs to support and strengthen First Nation language fluency development and cultural literacy that are grounded in traditional law and land-based learning opportunities that teach respect for self, others, land, water and air.

Outcomes

Outcomes are a statement of the end result we would like to see as a consequence of our literacy activities and programming under the Strategy. Achieving our stated outcomes demonstrates that we are meeting the goal and objectives of the Strategy.

Literacy, as presented here, is holistic and interconnected with many aspects of an individual's life. It is recognized that an increase in literacy skills can have broad outcomes and impacts including an individual's level of self-determination, their success with life transitions, and the ability to access services and engage with everyday life. Individual outcomes also translate into better outcomes for communities as a whole.

In this context, there are many possible outcomes that can be used to determine success. The following list is not intended to reflect all possibilities. The outcomes presented have been chosen because they are broad and measurable, which will be important during the evaluation phases of the Strategy. These outcomes are also intended for persons with disabilities, recognizing that similar literacy outcomes should be the goal for everybody.

Early Years:

- Children, parents and caregivers are using First Nation languages at home as a main language of communication.
- Children are meeting developmental milestones in cognition, motor and social-emotional skills, through their respective cultural context.
- Children are meeting First Nation defined language and culture milestones.
- Children from birth to three years are developing age appropriate verbal language skills.
- Children age three to five are developing age appropriate literacy skills.

School Age:

- First Nation students accomplish cultural learning milestones defined by the First Nation, such as: coming of age training, cultural practices, etc.
- First Nation students have a strong sense of self-identity and belonging as they will know who they are and where they come from based on traditional law.
- Children come to kindergarten equipped and prepared to learn.
- Students meet or exceed acceptable standards in Language Arts (grades 4, 7, 10 and 12).

- Students successfully master First Nation defined standards in language fluency at all grade levels from kindergarten through Grade 12.
- High school Dogwood Completion within 6 years of Grade 8.
- Successful transitions from Grade 8 to 9, and 9 to 10.
- Improved overall graduation rate.
- Students graduating have the academic knowledge, skills and abilities to pursue their choice of higher education.
- For students with an Individual Education Plan (IEP) or Student Learning Plan, improved numbers who have successfully completed their program of study.
- Students will graduate with an understanding of Yukon First Nation culture, language and traditional laws, including the historical legacy of residential schools, as supported by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission recommendations 62, 63 and 64, and the principles embedded in 14 (See appendix 1).

Adult:

- Increased numbers of First Nation people able to communicate in their language and higher levels of literacy achieved.
- Increased numbers of First Nation teachers fully competent in their culture and fluent in their language.
- Improved scores on international literacy surveys.
- Achievement of adults' stated goals or action plan.
- Increased levels of Literacy and Essential Skills for adults
- Increased employability skills for adults

Implementation, Monitoring, and Evaluation of the Strategy

The *Yukon Literacy Strategy* is accompanied by the *Action Plan for Literacy*, in which actions and associated projects are identified to accomplish each of the above goals, objectives and achieve the stated outcomes.

Increasing the literacy skills of Yukoners requires the coordinated efforts of many partners, at many different levels. Throughout the development of the Strategy, it was acknowledged that parents, families and caregivers, volunteers, community and non-profit groups, libraries, training organizations, schools, employers and industry associations, First Nation governments, Government of Yukon, and not least the individual, all have important roles to play in literacy development.

Many programs and services are already in place to promote and develop literacy skills; this Strategy furthers these activities. All partners fill distinct niches in terms of mandates, location, skill development, or client focus (including age group, linguistic and cultural groups). Each is important in achieving the goal of increased literacy for Yukoners.

This document stands as a Strategy created by and for all partners, for the development of literacy skills throughout the territory. All partners will take responsibility for the implementation of the Strategy and for the monitoring and evaluation of the outcomes.

Through monitoring, the Yukon Literacy Strategy Working Group will be kept informed about the progress of the overall implementation of the Action Plan. Monitoring is performed while a project is being implemented, with the aim of improving the project design and function while in action. Monitoring will involve Yukon Education's Advanced Education Branch facilitating the collection of information and data from participating organizations implementing the Action Plan and sharing that information with the Yukon Literacy Strategy Working Group.

The difference between monitoring and evaluation is that the former is concerned with the gathering of information and the latter with interpreting it.

Evaluation involves an assessment of the implementation and outcomes of the Strategy after a longer period of implementation (i.e., between 5-10 years) and is concerned with the outcome of a project with the aim of informing the design of future projects. Evaluation will examine the extent to which the goal and objectives of the Strategy have been fulfilled, as well as the efficiency, effectiveness, impact, reach, and sustainability of the *Action Plan for Literacy* over the long term.

An evaluation guideline will be created by the Yukon Literacy Strategy Working Group with direct involvement from First Nations. The guideline will support the development and implementation of evaluation plans to evaluate literacy programs and projects in Yukon. The evaluation guideline will also be used to conduct an evaluation of the implementation of the Strategy.

Conclusion

The *Yukon Literacy Strategy* represents the efforts of many Yukon literacy partners to increase literacy levels for all Yukoners, at all stages of life. It represents the recognition that raising literacy levels requires a concerted and coordinated effort from all partners, including parents, all orders of government, non-governmental organizations, educational institutions and the private sector. There is also recognition that literacy levels impact all aspects of one's life, including education, health, and employment outcomes.

The Strategy reflects the education, social, cultural and political landscape of the Yukon. For example, this Strategy has a vision, goal, and outcomes that incorporate Yukon First Nation philosophies, goals and priorities on literacy. Yukon First Nation languages are in a state of crisis as they face near extinction. All Yukoners, have a stake in and benefit from the survival of all Yukon First Nation languages given the cultural diversity that makes Yukon what it is. All those providing literacy services involving Yukon First Nations have a role to play to save the languages.

The *Yukon Literacy Strategy* and the *Action Plan for Literacy* will support that coordinated work for the next ten years.

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Appendix 1

Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action (62-64)

Education for Reconciliation

62. We call upon the federal, provincial, and territorial governments, in consultation and collaboration with Survivors, Aboriginal peoples, and educators, to:
- i. Make age-appropriate curriculum on residential schools, Treaties, and Aboriginal peoples' historical and contemporary contributions to Canada a mandatory education requirement for Kindergarten to Grade Twelve students.
 - ii. Provide the necessary funding to post-secondary institutions to educate teachers on how to integrate Indigenous knowledge and teaching methods into classrooms.
 - iii. Provide the necessary funding to Aboriginal schools to utilize Indigenous knowledge and teaching methods in classrooms.
 - iv. Establish senior-level positions in government at the assistant deputy minister level or higher dedicated to Aboriginal content in education.
63. We call upon the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada to maintain an annual commitment to Aboriginal education issues, including:
- i. Developing and implementing Kindergarten to Grade Twelve curriculum and learning resources on Aboriginal peoples in Canadian history, and the history and legacy of residential schools.
 - ii. Sharing information and best practices on teaching curriculum related to residential schools and Aboriginal history.
 - iii. Building student capacity for intercultural understanding, empathy, and mutual respect.
 - iv. Identifying teacher-training needs relating to the above.
64. We call upon all levels of government that provide public funds to denominational schools to require such schools to provide an education on comparative religious studies, which must include a segment on Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada Aboriginal spiritual beliefs and practices developed in collaboration with Aboriginal Elders.