

Community Matters

Literacy: In its Many Forms



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Spring Edition

Edmonton Social Planning Council





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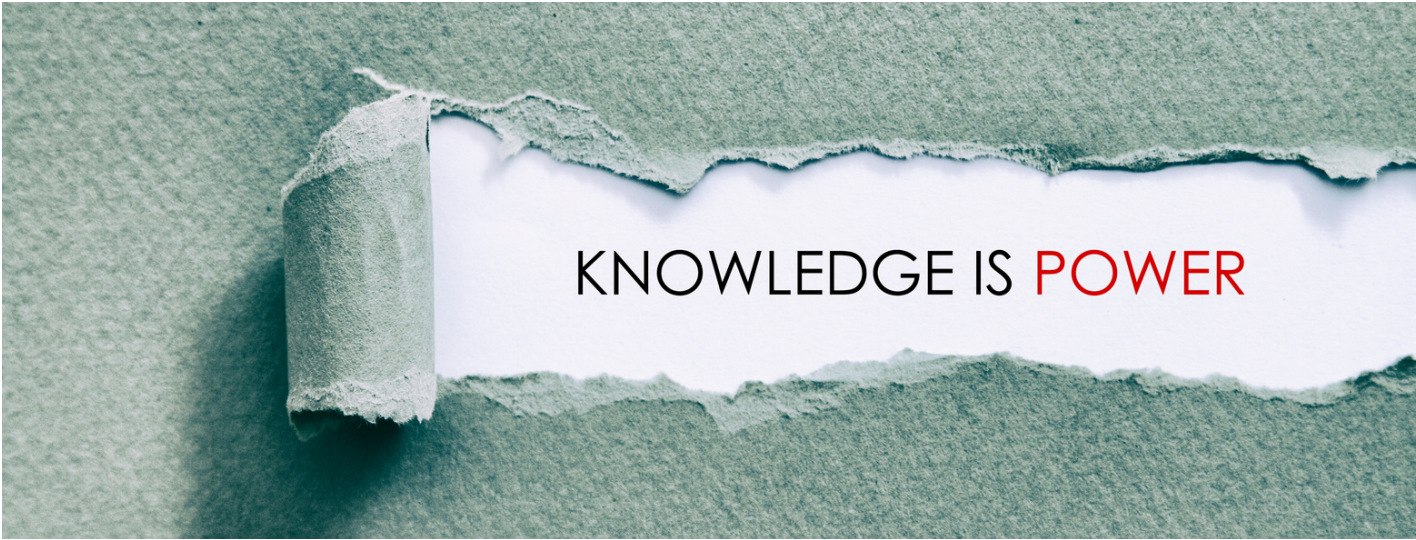
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Community Matters

Welcome to the Spring Edition of our quarterly publication, Community Matters.

Community Matters aims to inform the community about social issues that impact citizens and connect the dots between social issues, evidence, and policy. We aim to use this space to give a voice to local agencies, ESPC volunteer writers, and staff members alike.

Each edition spotlights a specific social issue and demonstrates the intersectional nature and impacts on equality. Our goal is to use evidence and the voices of the people as we continue to inform on the issues affecting individuals, families and our community.

For the current edition, we are focusing on literacy in all its forms. When it comes to the work around poverty reduction and elimination, just as food security, housing security, income security, and others are integral strategies, so too is literacy and the positive impact it has on alleviating poverty. There is great work happening in our community around literacy, but part of affecting change is continuing to keep the conversation going.

Literacy in its many forms, impacts nearly all facets of our lives and this issue of Community Matters strives to touch upon some of the varying intersections that literacy takes. This includes articles on digital literacy, cultural literacy, health literacy, physical literacy, legal literacy, as well as policy literacy and impacts on the wider educational system. All of these provide illumination on the various ways in which literacy is so crucial to navigating our complex society and how it helps people thrive.

Improving literacy rates for marginalized populations means you are more likely to find and keep a job, attain education (particularly higher education), and participate meaningfully in communities and, more broadly, in democracy. With improved literacy rates comes a more empowered, educated, and healthier society.

In Canada, nearly half (49%) of the adult population struggles to some extent with literacy, and we must work towards closing this gap.

We hope these articles bring about more attention to the ways in which attaining these different types of literacy helps to build a community in which all people are full and valued participants.

-Susan Morrissey, Executive Director





Literacy: Terms and Definitions

Written by Brett Lambert

Literacy encompasses many different forms and can be used for many different aspects of life. It is far from limited to the confines of the ability to read and understand words on a page. Below are some key definitions of various kinds of literacy. Many of these types of literacies will be explored in more detail throughout this issue of *Community Matters*.

What is literacy?

According to Alberta Education, literacy is defined as “the ability, confidence and willingness to engage with language to acquire, construct and communicate meaning in all aspects of daily living.” Literacy can include reading, writing, viewing, listening, speaking, and more. A technologically-driven world has expanded our notions of literacy as we communicate and interact globally using multiple types of print, images, symbols, and sounds, especially through digital media. [1]

Literacy is important because it opens up opportunities for individuals to acquire the knowledge they need to achieve personal goals and improve their quality of life. Literacy helps lay the foundation for lifelong learning and active participation in society. [2]

Major Types of Literacy



Civic literacy:

The Samara Centre for Democracy defines civic literacy as “knowing about the institutions of government and how they work, having awareness of the issues of the day, understanding how to take political action to pursue a cause, and carefully consuming media both on- and offline.” The four dimensions of civic literacy identified by the Samara Centre are institutional knowledge (e.g. knowledge of democratic processes), political ability (e.g. voting, writing to elected leaders), topical knowledge (e.g. following current affairs, awareness of public policy issues), and media literacy (e.g. recognizing false information, and identifying bias). [7]

Cultural literacy:

ABC Life Literacy Canada defines cultural literacy as “being able to understand the traditions, regular activities and history of a group of people from a given culture.” Aspects of a culture can include their language, arts, science, beliefs and practices, and their understanding of their environment.

Having cultural literacy can help someone understand, relate to, and interact with people from diverse backgrounds that may be different from their own. Learning about how other people live can make you more culturally sensitive and aware. [8]



Digital literacy:

British Columbia’s Digital Literacy Framework defines digital literacy as “the interest, attitude and ability of individuals to use digital technology and communication tools appropriately to access, manage, integrate, analyze, and evaluate information, construct new knowledge, and create and communicate with others.”

Characteristics of digital literacy include information literacy, critical thinking and decision making, digital citizenship (e.g. practicing legal and ethical behaviour), and sound understanding of technology concepts and operations. [5]

Financial literacy:

According to the Government of Canada’s Task Force on Financial Literacy, financial literacy is defined as “having the knowledge, skills and confidence to make responsible financial decisions.” Achieving these skills means a person can make day to day choices about how to spend their money and stay on top of financial obligations. As well, navigate the financial marketplace, plan ahead for how to use their money for life goals such as retirement, and evaluate financial information and advice they get. In addition, they can make the best use of the resources they have such as tax credits, workplace benefits, pensions, and others. [3]





Health literacy:

The Centers for Disease Control defines personal health literacy as “the degree to which individuals have the ability to find, understand, and use information and services to inform health-related decisions and actions for themselves and others.”

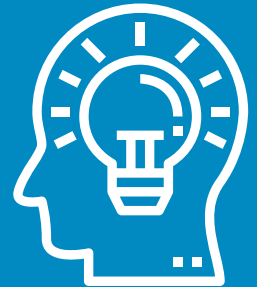
There is also organizational health literacy, which describes “the degree to which organizations equitably enable individuals to find, understand, and use information and services to inform health-related decisions and actions for themselves and others.”

These are recently revised definitions, which seek to acknowledge that organizations have a responsibility to address health literacy, incorporate a public health perspective, and emphasize a person’s ability to use health information instead of just understanding it. [6]

Information literacy:

The American Library Association defines information literacy as “a set of abilities requiring individuals to recognize when information is needed and have the ability to locate, evaluate, and use effectively the needed information.” This skill is considered particularly important in a time of rapid technological change and the significant increase of information resources.

With so much information coming from varying and unfiltered sources, questions about the accuracy, validity, and reliability of this information comes into question. The increasing quantity of information coupled with uncertain quality poses challenges for society. An informed citizenry needs the ability to evaluate information and its sources critically in order to use information effectively and incorporate it into one’s knowledge base. [4]



Legal literacy:

In “Legal Literacy: An Introduction to Legal Studies” by Archie Zariski, a number of expanded definitions for legal literacy are offered, which emphasizes being a member of the community while also challenging the legal system.

“Full legal literacy goes beyond the development of a basic legal competence and implies the acquisition of knowledge, understanding and critical judgment about the substance of law, legal process and legal resources, enabling and encouraging the utilization of capacities in practice.” [10]

Workplace literacy:

ABC Life Literacy Canada defines workplace literacy as “the skills employees need to have in order to be successful at work functions and manage the demands of their jobs in a healthy, productive way.”

Having workplace literacy means an employee can work accurately and efficiently, ensure workplace safety, as well helps them obtain and maintain employment, and earn more. [9]

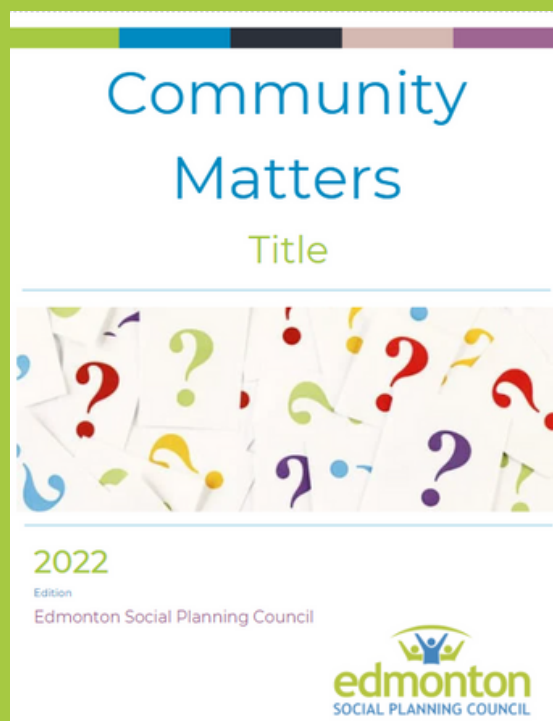


For references, click [here](#)

Would you or your agency like to get involved in Community Matters?

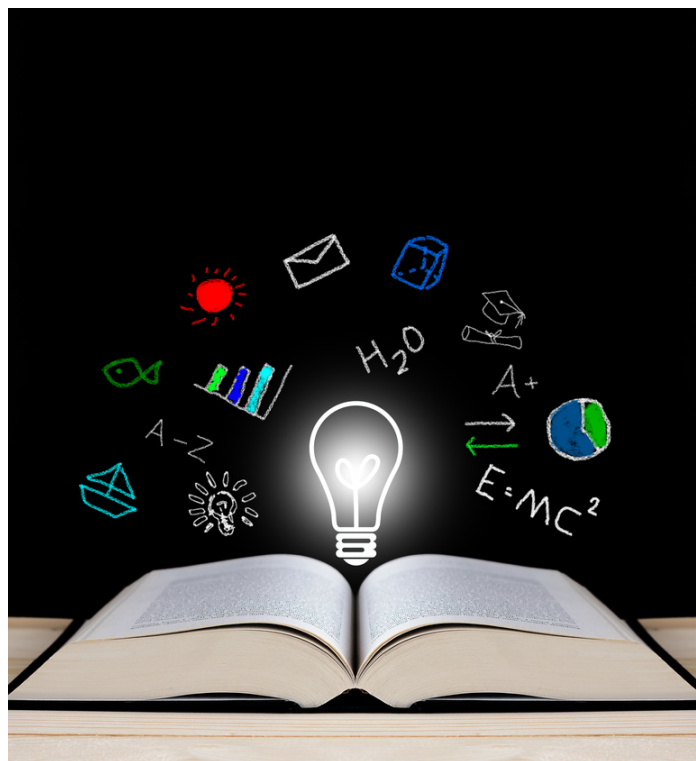
There are multiple ways that you or your organization can contribute to our upcoming publication in June, which will focus on Justice. Our planning for the June edition will be starting soon!

For more information or to express your interest please contact:
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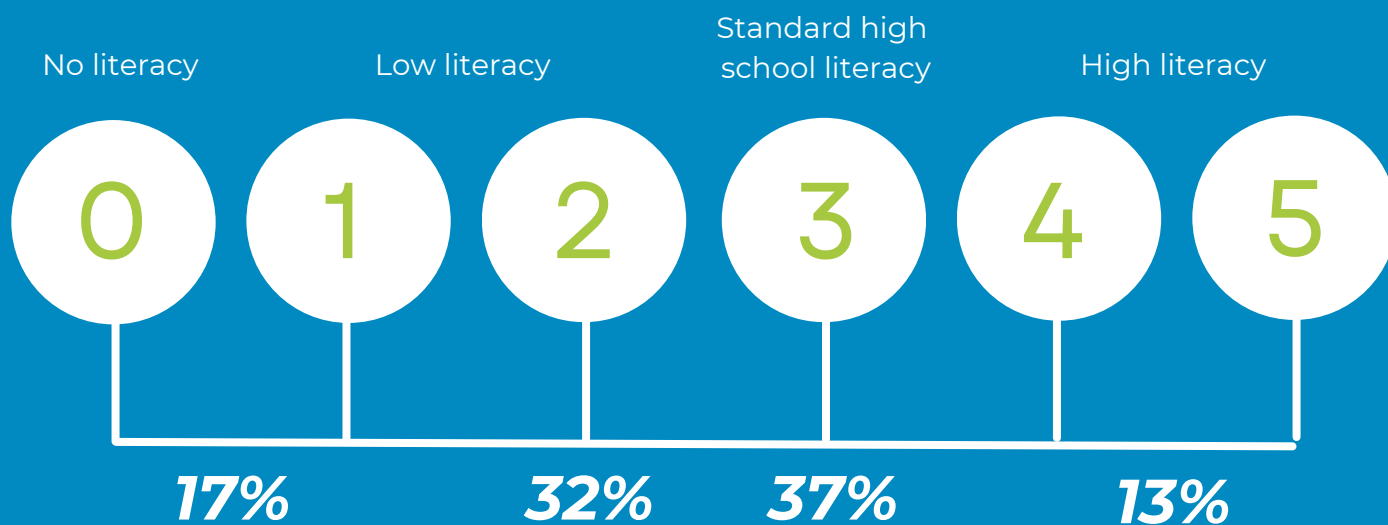


Literacy Rates in Canada – What is Known

Information on adult literacy rates in Canada is limited. The most recent data is from 2012, based on the results of the Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC), an initiative of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). The PIAAC's 2012 results measured literacy, numeracy, and problem solving in technology-rich environments (PS-TRE) for the Canadian population aged 16 to 65.



The national percentage of literacy skills [1]



Nearly half (49%) of all Canadians are struggling with literacy skills below Level 3. [1]

There is a strong relationship between literacy skill level and household income.

Those with low literacy skills have more difficulty finding a job, and the jobs that are available are often low-wage.

For individuals with literacy rates at the lowest level, 29% were low-income households. [2]



Those in the lowest literacy levels are more likely to fall under other marginalized groups.

For example, people with a literacy score below level 1 fell in the following categories [2] :

- 17% of all people
- 30% of recent immigrants
- 26% of Indigenous Peoples
- 27% of single adults,
- 23% of people with an activity limitation



Within Alberta

15%

of adults have a literacy score of Level 1 or below

30%

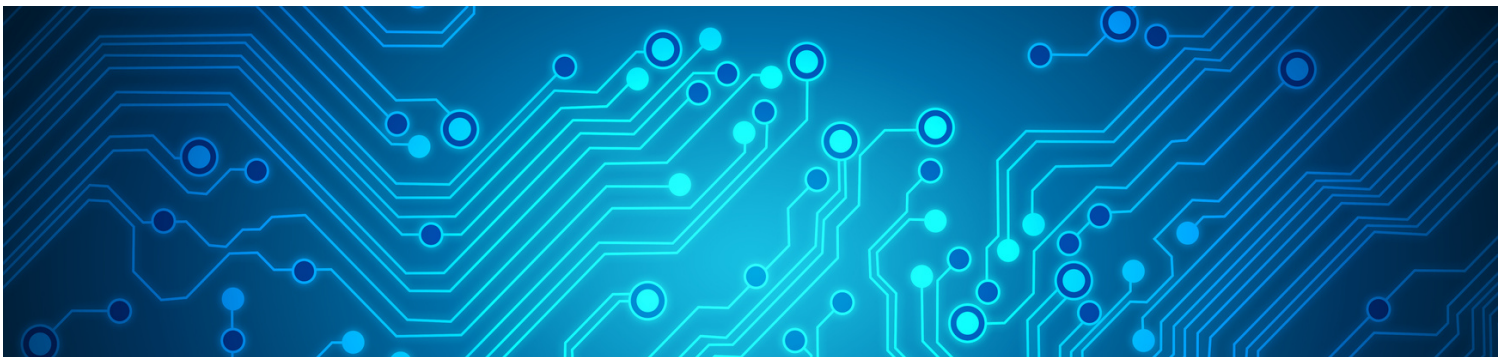
of adults have a literacy score of Level 2

In total,

45%

of Albertans are struggling with literacy skills below Level 3, or below standard high school and is slightly below the national average.

For references, click [here](#)



The Importance of Digital Literacy

Written by Laureen Guldbrandsen

Digital Literacy Coordinator, PALS

Digital Literacy is more than just the knowledge about and ability to use the technology available right now. It is also about building the confidence to adapt as technology inevitably changes. (1) It includes being able to turn on your computer, access your emails, and use the latest operating system without too many problems.

While digital literacy is something we've addressed before, COVID-19 highlighted the necessity it is. People scrambled to work remotely, learn (or help their children learn) online, search for new jobs, improve their employable and personal skills, and connect with friends and family. (2)

There are many benefits associated with improved digital literacy:

Social Inclusion

1

In a progressively digital age, more people are looking to connect online through the use of technology, like Zoom, WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger, etc. New digitized community support platforms are readily available to older adults, individuals in rural areas, individuals with disabilities, minority language speakers, etc. (3)

Critical Thinking

2

With access to the internet, individuals learn where and how to search online to do their own research. Individuals are learning how to use the internet to learn new skills, languages, and hobbies.

Quality of Life

3

Digital literacy allows the use of modern technology to make our lives easier - telehealth, accessing health records and requisitions, transportation, digital finance and others - meaning you must have foundational digital skills. Being able to access information and services with ease is a key component to living a good life.

Potential for Better Jobs

4

Many jobs only accept online applications and require a basic understanding of digital skills in order for employees to carry out tasks. As well we have seen an increase in the many remote job opportunities that are now available.



Challenges in Digital Literacy

While there are many benefits to digital literacy, there are also many challenges in this area. Technology is constantly changing, and as a result the bar for what we consider “basic” skills is constantly being raised. This means that those who do not have the foundational skills are left behind. In addition, changing technology means new terminology may be used. If there is a lack of access to digital literacy education or the learner does not have access to the digital tools to practice, then we again will see many challenges.

Intersectionality is a Compounded Challenge in Digital Literacy

When someone’s life is already impacted due to ethnicity, age, gender, economic status, or language barriers—including low-literacy—there is an intersection in how the individual is affected and existing inequalities are exacerbated. Intersectionality can be seen in various ways, (4) but the most common intersections with low-digital literacy skills include the following:

- Low-income individuals
- English Language Learners
- Women
- Persons with low literacy skills
- Age
- Health: mental, physical, differing abilities, et al.

How Project Adult Literacy Society Can Help

PALS helps adult learners improve their reading, writing, math, and basic digital skills. We offer our services free of charge, thanks to volunteer tutors, on a flexible schedule to meet service users’ needs.

Projected Adult Literacy Society helps more than 250 Edmontonians annually

2022 Statistics

266

Total learners

82

Digital learners

27

Learners in both LELL and Digital Literacy





In the digital literacy program, learners decide what they want to learn and work on the skills they feel they need to improve. The flexibility in what they choose to work on means that learners are improving the skills they need and are most interested in. Often these skills are not what we assume they need. This ensures that learners are an active and engaged part of their learning.

Learners are matched with tutors for one-to-one tutoring or may attend digital literacy classes which feature lessons on how to turn on and navigate basic computer usage up to learning how to use Microsoft Office to create recipes, resumes, and more.

Digital literacy is no longer a luxury, it is a fundamental human right. As technology changes, access to the right tools and knowledge is essential. Help an adult gain the skill they need and volunteer as a digital literacy tutor. More information is available on our website at palsedmonton.ca.





Cultural Literacy: Indigenous Protocol and Ways of Knowing

Written by Mackenzie Dachuk

As Canada becomes more diverse with multiculturalism, there is a need for cultural literacy among Canadian citizens and its newcomers. It is evident that Indigenous Peoples have and continue to experience cultural oppression and discrimination, which is why cultural literacy is so important for Canadian society. Not only is it important to be aware of and acknowledge oppression, it is also important to understand that “One of the main principals in partnering with First Nations is understanding their knowledge systems” (Sylliboy et al., 2021).

What is Cultural Literacy?

Culture is how a person or group of people live, which can include their language, art, science, beliefs, practices, and an understanding of their environment. Cultural literacy can be defined as having the means or ability to understand those traditions, activities, and histories of different groups of people (Literacy now Burnaby, 2022).

With a country that values and promotes multiculturalism, our society needs to make strides to becoming more culturally literate. Racism, prejudice, and discrimination start taking place when there is a dependency on assumed knowledge. Racism, for example, takes place

when there is a lack of understanding or valuing of the other person’s culture. This leads to stereotypes, discrimination, exclusion, and even violence (Western Sydney University, n.d.). When there is cultural literacy, there is acceptance and connection. It promotes empathy and respect among those who are different in culture. Most importantly, it can help us understand, relate, and interact with people from diverse backgrounds that may be different from our own (ABC Life Literacy Canada, 2023).

Indigenous Peoples of Canada have their own unique cultural practices, beliefs, languages, and traditions. Despite Canada’s efforts to assimilate, oppress, and erase Indigenous Peoples’ culture and way of life, they have remained persistent in fighting for their culture and knowledge to be recognized and celebrated. Protocol is an aspect within Indigenous culture that Canadian society seems to be illiterate in, and Indigenous Elders, knowledge keepers, and cultural teachers experience the repercussions of this lack of understanding.

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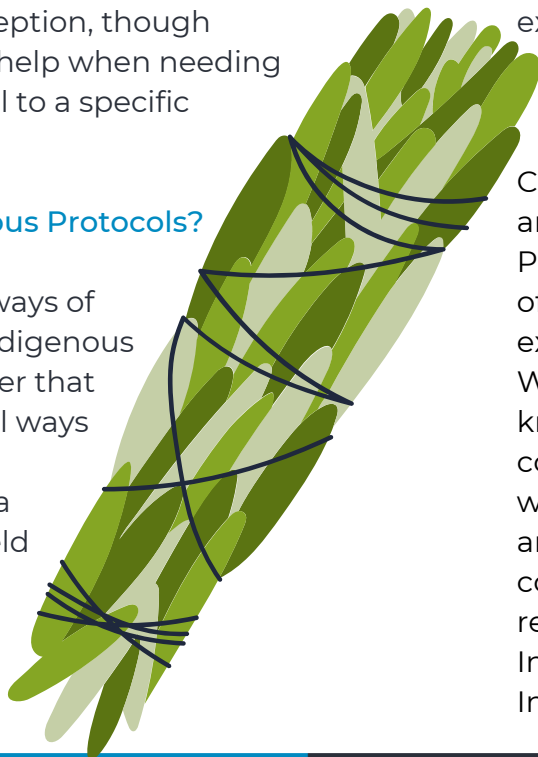
Protocol: A lack of cultural literacy

For centuries, Canadian society has been rooted in colonial practices and Eurocentrism, creating negative impacts on Indigenous Peoples (Antoine et al., 2018). In addition to these negative impacts, assimilation practices have prevented Indigenous Peoples from sustaining their culture. As a result, many people in Canada lack cultural literacy towards Indigenous culture and do not know what protocol is or what it looks like.

Understanding protocol is an example of cultural literacy, however many people lack this knowledge when engaging with Indigenous Elders, knowledge keepers, and cultural teachers. It's important to ask oneself why there is a lack of literacy of Indigenous culture and what can be done to avoid these misconceptions. Non-Indigenous citizens must be willing to listen and educate themselves with Indigenous cultural practices, especially when looking to utilize those practices. The barriers to understanding protocol will minimize when the public is more open and willing to engage in the work required. It is important to note that Indigenous Peoples are separate and unique nations, rather than a single group of people (Antoine et al., 2018). This is a common misconception, though knowing this may help when needing to offering protocol to a specific nation.

What are Indigenous Protocols?

Protocol refers to ways of interacting with Indigenous Peoples in a manner that respects traditional ways of being and are a representation of a culture's deeply held ethical system (University of Windsor, n.d.)



Protocol can be many things, it is important that one familiarizes themselves with the various guidelines and ways of knowing within Indigenous cultures. Like any family unit, culture, or organization, rules and guidelines are put in place to ensure that things are done properly and respectfully. Not only is protocol done for the purpose of respect, Indigenous Peoples and communities have also developed processes to protect their sovereign and inherent rights that involve their way of life (Sylliboy et al., 2021). Land acknowledgements are one process that can be used to recognize Indigenous Peoples who are the stewards of the lands on which we now live (Native Knowledge 360, n.d.). When traditional lands are recognized, Indigenous Peoples protect their sovereignty and power as a nation.

It is also important to know that protocol can be different from one Indigenous culture or community to another and can be highly complex and multilayered (University of Windsor, n.d.). Some examples of protocol include gift giving, offering of tobacco honorarium, and acknowledgments, and ceremonial cloth. Asking the Elder, knowledge keeper or cultural teacher what they require or expect for protocol is encouraged.

Exploitation of Indigenous Knowledge.

Cultural appropriation and cultural exploitation are some current issues faced by Indigenous Peoples. Their traditions, ceremonies, and way of life have and continue to be mocked and exploited, often for the benefit of the dominant Western culture. Regardless, Indigenous Elders, knowledge keepers, and cultural teachers continue to share their culture and knowledge with the public. "Elders and cultural teachers are held in high regard, by Indigenous communities, as they carry rights and responsibilities to hold, protect and share Indigenous ways of knowing" (Indigenous Initiatives, n.d.).

Western ideology is known to give value and merit to a person based on their title or position within society, as long as this position fits within the Western knowledge system. The services that Elders and Knowledge keepers provide are often expected to be given for free, whereas non-Indigenous speakers are financially compensated for their services. Elders or knowledge keepers are often exploited for their knowledge and experience by Western society, yet those non-Indigenous persons with a doctorate or Ph.D. receive full compensation or recognition for their knowledge and experience.

Redefining who is an expert is important to understanding the importance of diversity and inclusion because traditionally, experts have been seen only as people with academic rigor, reputation, or credentials, however expertise can also be reflected in peoples' lived experience (Gibson, 2018). Indigenous Peoples are continually experiencing oppression from the dominant ideology, one that holds power and privilege which is reflected through these knowledge systems. When society can begin to value both the traditional and Western knowledge systems and practices, cultural literacy will continue to grow and strengthen. There is much to celebrate about Indigenous culture. Their languages, art, land teachings, traditional music and dancing, food, and ceremony are beautiful aspects within Indigenous culture and are some ways we can celebrate alongside Indigenous Peoples.

Call to Action:

Going forward, what can the public do to become culturally literate on Indigenous protocols and ways of knowing? It starts by learning the history of Indigenous culture and getting to know what it means to work with knowledge keepers and Elders. It means stepping away from Western

knowledge systems and begin learning through and with Indigenous Peoples themselves. Attending cultural events, advocating for Indigenous sovereignty, allyship and connecting with local Indigenous communities are a few ways to learn about Indigenous culture. Getting to know Indigenous communities at this grassroots level will help in ending the stigmas and stereotypes that the colonial frameworks established, while expanding and developing a culturally literate society.

Indigenous Learning Resources:

There are several learning resources available to the public for expanding cultural literacy. The [Truth and Reconciliation Commission Calls to Action](#) as well as the [United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples](#) are two great starting resources to guide people in the right direction. Elders, Indigenous Knowledge keepers, and cultural teachers are there to share their teachings, and by understanding protocol, you can have deeper access to Indigenous cultural literacy. Alberta Native Friendship centers are great resources for accessing a variety of cultural programming. [Bent Arrow Traditional Healing Society](#) is a great resource for expanding cultural literacy as they support many partners in elevating their capacity to serve the Indigenous community in a culturally relevant, authentic, and sincere way

Mackenzie Dachuk is currently in her third year of the Bachelor of Social Work program at MacEwan University and is completing her practicum with the Edmonton Social Planning Council. She has a passion for helping others and empowering them in achieving their goals. Mackenzie plays hockey for the MacEwan women's team and enjoys sports, travel, and connecting with the community.

For references, click [here](#)



Neoliberalism in Alberta's Education System

Written by Sydney Sheloff

Policy Literacy

Policy is complicated. However, it is essential that the average Albertan understand it. Policy shapes almost every element of our lives; education, health care, equal rights, and affordable housing are all shaped by policies our governments create. By better understanding policy, in other words, developing one's policy literacy, the average citizen can be better prepared to advocate for policies that impact their lives. This may mean supporting policies that will have a positive impact or challenging policies that may have negative impacts.

Understanding policy requires understanding the forces that underlie policy. The policies that get created are not neutral, they are shaped by systems of power. Policies are created by whatever political party is in power and can be influenced by other institutions that governments want to keep in favour. Political parties want to stay in power, so they often make policy decisions that will maintain citizen support, and that do not create division or conflict within their parties. Policies are also shaped by powerful ideologies: protecting the things a society values, or addressing problems that are seen to be worth solving (Krings, Fusaro, Nicoll, & Lee, 2019). In the context of Alberta, policies are currently being created by the United Conservative Party (UCP) and shaped by neoliberal

ideology. These ideas will be illustrated in this article through the example of education policy and its impacts on children.

Neoliberalism in the Education System

Neoliberalism is a social, political, and economic regulatory system that calls for limited government involvement in the market and social life in order to promote individual responsibility and freedom. Neoliberal policies involve the privatization of public resources and services, the reduction of government regulations, and the shrinking of government involvement in welfare projects in order to push people to become independent (Harvey, 2005; Turner, 2014). However, neoliberalism often creates the opposite of what it claims to do – by privatizing public goods and services and divesting from welfare projects, people living in marginalized social positions are not afforded adequate resources to make a good life for themselves, and the systems end up entrenching their poverty.

Neoliberal ideas spread into all aspects of modern life – our entire lives are thought to be our own personal responsibility – when we do well it's because we acted responsibly, and when we struggle it is our fault for making the wrong choices. This system erases the larger



social forces and problems that shape our lives (McNutt, 2020) such as systemic racism, ableism, and classism.

By this framework, the goal of education is to teach conformity to the status quo, that is, teach students to conform with neoliberalism. Lessons are focused on preparing students to be good workers who follow the rules (Sims, 2017). Student achievement is increasingly based on standardized tests in which students have to memorize facts rather than demonstrate that they actually understand the material. Multiple choice tests that stress that there is only one “right” answer discourages critical thinking. When student success is based heavily on these tests, teachers may end up “teaching to the test” which discourages students from pursuing their personal interests (Sims, 2017). As a result, students only learn one understanding of the world – an understanding that reinforces the status quo – and do not get opportunities to critically reflect on material and think differently.

The Alberta Context

These ideas are highly evident in the UCP’s provincial curriculum redevelopment and implementation which directs the policies that govern education. Analyses of the curriculum while still in draft form have demonstrated that the curriculum focuses on teaching students’ “core knowledge” without the time to contextualize that knowledge. Several critics have noted that the curriculum has such a large

amount of material that teachers will have to teach in shallow and decontextualized ways to get through it all. This way of teaching focuses on memorization and does not allow students to understand topics on a deeper level (Patrie, Howe, and Lorenz, 2021; Auckerman, Burwell, Seidel, & Scott, 2021).

Researchers out of Calgary have argued that many lessons in the curriculum are not developmentally appropriate, and the structure of the curriculum discourages critical thinking. For example, inferring (learning to come to a conclusion from evidence and reasoning) from text in Language Arts is not introduced until grade three, when research has proven these skills can be developed in grade one, delaying student’s development of critical thinking skills. Also in the English curriculum, the curriculum largely uses the word “identify” but rarely uses terms such as analyze or critique, showing that children are not encouraged to think critically about the texts they engage with (Auckerman, Burwell, Seidel, & Scott, 2021). The Social Studies curriculum has been criticized as well for being too focused on European history and paying little attention and respect to Indigenous Peoples (Chau-Wong & Oyasiji, 2022). Despite these criticisms, which were made by a large number of childhood and education specialists, no changes were made to the curriculum.



Neoliberalism in education also looks like the proliferation of ‘choices’ to public education – such as charter schools and voucher systems (Santone, 2019). Charter schools are autonomous, non-profit public schools that have a special area of focus, but they do not have to follow the same regulations as public schools. Alberta is the only province in Canada that provides public funds to charter schools, and the current UCP government has suggested it wants to create more. While they claim charter schools offer families choice in where they go to school, this choice is often only available to families who can afford them. Despite not being accessible to all students, Charter schools get public funding, which divests money and resources from free public education. This system, according to the Alberta Teachers Association, privileges a select few students at the expense of all others (McAthey, 2022). Students in privileged social positions will get a ‘choice’ of schools, but the rest will be stuck in a system that is slowly being eroded.

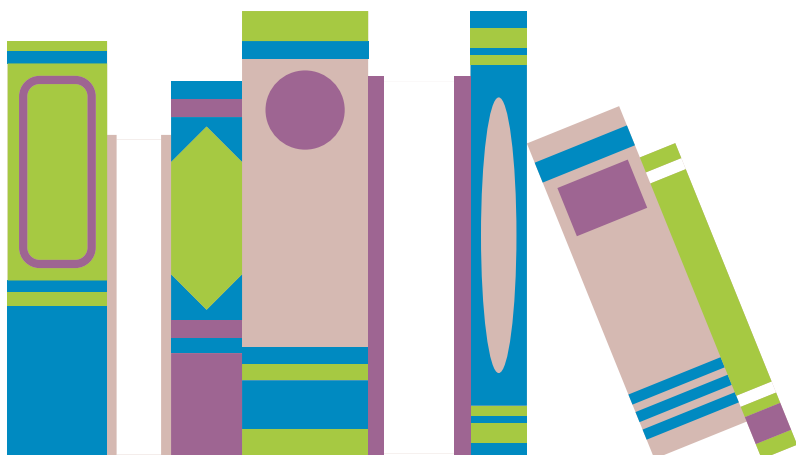
Impacts on students

Proponents of the neoliberal education system often claim it is about meritocracy – if students do well it is because they worked hard and made the right choices (Santone, 2019). However, as demonstrated above, neoliberal education policies really only reward a particular kind of learner, and all other students are pushed away.

At the same time the government is implementing a problematic public school curriculum, they are putting policies in place that privilege charter schools that only serve a select few. These processes work together so that students in public schools will have their quality of education eroded – they are subject to a curriculum that does not serve their needs and will have less resources and supports to do well in school. While families in more privileged social positions can “choose” to go to the charter schools to mitigate some of these challenges, many Edmonton students will not have that chance.

Students’ experiences in elementary school education influence their beliefs about education for years to come. Memorizing facts without context is hard, and many students will struggle with this form of learning. This does not just impact school success; it impacts long-term happiness. When school success is constructed as the responsibility of the student, students who do not do well will blame themselves, and may feel incapable or inadequate. This has lasting impacts on their self-esteem and belief in themselves to take on new challenges and learning opportunities as they age. In more extreme circumstances, it may push children out of school prematurely, which has long lasting implications for their employment, health, housing and many other elements of their lives.

Schools should provide children an opportunity for self-discovery, to foster creativity, to be curious and learn new things, and to develop their interests. However, when school becomes all about preparing children for the working world, it may limit their opportunity to explore and pursue interests that do not achieve these goals. Topics that address systemic racism and oppression, acknowledge reconciliation and Indigenous Ways of Knowing, history, social



justice, literature, and the arts are disregarded. What would education policy look like if decision makers valued these core tenants of education? What could children achieve under this other system?

By understanding the policies being created, the powers behind them, and the impacts that they have on our lives, we can advocate for policies that serve us better. It is important that curriculums are developed by experts in childhood development and education, and that curriculums have built in opportunities for children to develop critical thinking skills, foster creativity, and pursue the topics that interest them. The public education system needs robust funding in order to ensure students have the resources to succeed. Children are more than future workers; schools should give students the tools they need to thrive in whatever future they envision for themselves.

What can we do?

It is important that we vote for parties whose ideologies reflect the society we want to live in, and that we hold governments accountable to make policy decisions that serve our needs. Policies that governments are considering are often in the news. Take the time to read up on these policies, listen to opinions of people with different backgrounds, talk with your friends, and think critically about how it may affect you and your community members. Governments are supposed to represent all of us, [contact your local MLA](#) and let them know your opinion. While policies are shaped by systems of power, everyday citizens have the power to tell our governments what we want from them.

For references, click [here](#)

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The Law is All Around Us: A Case for Public Legal Education and Information

Written by Nathalie Tremblay

Education Design & Evaluation Specialist; Centre for Public Legal Education Alberta

Learning about the law is not just something you do when confronted with a serious legal issue. Personal legal capability is about awareness, citizenship, human rights, social engagement and having the confidence to advocate for yourself when you have to. This article will introduce the readers to the work of the Centre for Public Legal Education Alberta (CPLEA) and its efforts to increase Albertans' access to justice by developing free accessible resources about the laws that are all around us – from everyday legal issues to more significant matters.

About CPLEA: the importance of a name

CPLEA is a non-profit organization that has been active in Alberta for almost 50 years! First introduced as the Legal Resource Centre, a decision was made by its board in 2012 to start operating as the “Centre for Public Legal Education Alberta.” The new name was deemed to better reflect the identity and purpose of the organization. It also signals that its main goal is to serve the general public. It is very important for an organization devoted to increasing Albertan’s “legal literacy” with plain language information to present itself clearly.

What do we mean by legal literacy?

In the [Public Legal Education \(PLE\)](#) field, the concept of legal literacy is mostly referred to as legal “capability.” This is a fairly new addition to the PLE vocabulary describing the basic legal competencies and awareness that everyone should have. Meaning, the ability to understand and use legal information. We can all imagine how one can feel when involved in a legal matter full of unknowns. Having timely access to reliable, plain language information can



make a difference in the anxiety level an individual experiences by providing some sense of control over a given situation. Greater legal capability helps people to learn the right vocabulary, formulate questions, decide on next steps, decide who to talk to, etc. More clarity and better awareness provide more decision-making opportunities. .

People who cannot afford to access the services of a lawyer (unrepresented litigants) or people who make the decision to represent themselves (self-represented litigants) have a variety of needs when it comes to legal information. Organizations such as CPLEA become an important link in the legal assistance chain.

Ultimately if people decide to use the services of a professional like a lawyer or a mediator, having some of the necessary knowledge, vocabulary and concepts allows them to ask targeted questions and access the right services in a timelier fashion. There can also be a financial benefit to the consumer, as the professional can spend less time with basic explanations and instead dedicate more time to strategies and solutions. The good news is that in Alberta, there is an increasing availability of limited scope legal services and coaching, a concept well described in this [LawNow article](#).

Legal topics and their importance

CPLEA develops a large variety of information on legal topics based on identified needs. We make use of web analytics and survey data to make decisions about specific resources and delivery.



It is essentially using public input to generate the right output!

Some of our resources are also the result of close collaboration with social and community agencies who are able to identify areas of need directly from their interactions with the public.

This work is continuous and ongoing because of the nature of legislation which changes regularly and greatly affects people depending on circumstances and context, for example:

- Sizable and complex areas of law such as [Family Law](#) calls for a large array of resources spanning from divorce and parenting to contact orders and financial support and everything in between. There are many ways of approaching *Family Law* in Alberta, many points of entry into the court system and many ways to resolve disputes out of court. CPLEA's resources play an important part in providing clarity.
- Dramatic events such as a global pandemic sadly draw attention to areas of law where people are most affected like [Landlord and Tenant](#) and [Employment](#).
- New laws such as [Canada's Ban on Conversion Therapy](#) requires plain language information to be disseminated to the population in a clear and sensitive manner.

Everything is in the delivery!

Developing reliable public legal information in plain language to increase access to justice and expand people's legal capability is of course a major part of the work at CPLEA. However, great resources must reach their audience to be effective! Facilitating access to our resources is of the utmost importance to affect people's lives. CPLEA delivers its information in a variety of ways to boost accessibility by accommodating individual preferences, modes of access, interests, and settings:

- **Digital resources and specialized websites:** Info sheets, booklets, and posters are available to download online. Several separate specialized websites addressing specific areas of law and targeted audiences are also part of CPLEA offerings.
- **Hard copy resources:** For people needing hard copy materials for personal use or to distribute to clients, resources can be ordered and will be delivered for free anywhere in Alberta.
- **Videos:** Our YouTube channel "[CPLEA-TV](#)" presents a collection of short videos and recorded webinars to watch on-demand.
- **Presentations and webinars:** These offerings are in direct response to requests or emerging needs.
- **Self-directed learning modules:** Learning opportunities for people to explore areas of the law on their own! This type of learning is a growing aspect of CPLEA's component of resources.
- **Social media:** Posts and short quizzes to direct people's attention to useful and timely resources.



Learning about the law is not usually top of mind because people don't always realize that legal aspects permeate many things in their daily life. From mobile phone contracts to wills and estates, knowing about a place to go for knowledge and awareness is key.

To access all CPLEA offerings, visit www.cplea.ca

You can also subscribe to our monthly newsletter [What's New @ CPLEA](#) to keep in touch with our work!



SOS: I Need Help with my Medication

Written by Faizath Yallou

As technological advances become more prevalent in daily activities, health literacy is a focus of attention. It refers to the ability to understand how to access and apply health information and health services. (1) Health literacy involves not only reading comprehension, but also a level of critical thinking to be able to absorb the information given. Ultimately, health literacy allows patients to be active participants in decision making. (2)

Digital health literacy

The increased use of technology in health service delivery adds a layer of complexity for patients. Digital health literacy is the ability to get information from an electronic source and apply that knowledge. (2) An example would be providing an electronic system that patients would use to place a request for medication refills. Patients must have access to a computer or smartphone. They must be familiar with how to use the device, and understand how to navigate the internet to interpret the information and input their personal details.

Medication non-adherence as a consequence of poor health literacy

Health literacy impacts medication non-adherence, meaning the inability to take one's own prescription as intended for various reasons. Examples of this include: not being able to name

Canadian Data



1 in 6 people do not have appropriate health literacy (6)



88% of elderly individuals have low health literacy (5)

As per the Canadian Council on learning, Indigenous Peoples health literacy scores are at least

16%

lower than non-Indigenous Peoples (7)

medications or recall the dose or administration instructions, the inability to read the labels correctly including information on storage, foods to avoid, etc. (1) Medication non-adherence leads to poorly managed disease and higher risk of hospitalization, increased healthcare costs as well as increased mortality. (3) A review of the literature published in 2014 by Zhang et al. found that higher literacy levels were associated with better medication adherence. (3) It has also been reported that 50% of people with chronic diseases are not taking their medications as prescribed. The concept of medication adherence is quite complex as it involves not only understanding instructions on dosing, but also remembering to take the medications on time, often several medications at a time with different dosing instructions and recognizing and addressing the potential side effects. (4)

Causes and risk factors

In Canada, the risk factors identified include the following:

- Being an ethnic or racial minority
- Not completing high school
- Living in poverty
- Speaking a language other than English as a first language (5)

Second generation immigrants were less likely to report good health compared to third plus generation immigrants and this may be explained by the difficulty in adjusting to life in Canada, poor access to health care, limited knowledge of services or lack of support as well as lower incomes. (6) Although there is no robust data examining health literacy in Indigenous populations, Lambert et al. (2014) found that health professionals often do not grasp the difficulties that Indigenous Peoples may have in navigating the health system. Barriers are, among others, cultural differences, poverty, and lack of Indigenous health professionals. (7)



Pediatric medicine and health literacy

In a survey of adolescents 16 years or older in the United States, researchers found that those who reported having a learning disability had worse medication adherence than their counterparts who did not have a learning disability. (8) For pediatric patients with chronic conditions, having a parent with low health literacy has been associated with lower outcomes due to dosing errors or incorrect interpretation of instructions. (9)

Recognize low health literacy

Low health literacy routinely is overlooked. Although there are tools available to use in the clinical setting, they may be limited in scope in terms of gender and ethnicity and thus not applicable to every demographic. (5) Patients with low health literacy may not recognize the signs or feel shame. (1) Indeed, a study showed that 67.2% of patients with low health literacy had never disclosed it to their spouses. (5) A study from the University of British Columbia revealed that pharmacists often fail to identify low health literacy in patients. They are often not aware of the screening tools and when the tools are available, there are time constraints or a lack of support from the leadership. (5)

Verbal Communication

- Plain non-medical language (no jargon)
- Give examples of specific times when to take medications
- Have the patient repeat key points to confirm understanding
- If using an electronic system, have the patient demonstrate use (2)

Written Communication

- Language fit for a 5th or 6th grader
- Highlight or underline pertinent information
- Provide medication lists with clear instructions
- Use the patient's preferred language when possible

Visual Aids

- Pictograms can illustrate instructions (helpful if there is a language barrier)
- May replace written information to not overwhelm patients
- Always review and never assume that videos and pictograms are well understood

What can you do?

Never assume that medical terms are commonly understood. Practitioners should review medication lists frequently with patients to ensure adequate adherence, and ask patients how they manage to remember to take their medications at home. (1) While there may be uncomfortable moments, these are important discussions to have to ensure the success of therapy recommendations.

To learn more

The [Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality](#) provides several tools to aid health professionals in optimizing medication teaching as well as assessment of adherence. In addition, there are training courses tailored for health professionals who wish to learn more on this topic. There is also a section with tools to empower patients in communicating with their health providers.

For examples of health literacy tools that may be utilized in clinical settings, the Newest Vital Sign is often used and is quick to complete (within 5 minutes). You may find it [here](#).

Faiza Yallou currently lives in Edmonton and is interested in highlighting local projects aimed towards optimizing social determinants of health. Faiza is thrilled to be a part of the Edmonton Social Planning Council and to raise awareness about the social issues in our community. Faiza is a volunteer with Edmonton Social Planning Council.

For references, click [here](#)



Beyond Gym Class: Physical Literacy's Role in Lifelong Health

Written by Carrie Cyre

The United Nations defines literacy as an essential life skill that enables individuals to fully address the challenges of the 21st century (PHE Canada, 2023). Literacy enables greater participation in the labour market, supports sustainable development, improves health and nutrition, and reduces poverty (UNESCO, 2022). Physical literacy is a type of literacy associated with health and body knowledge, movement and activity. Many nations, including Canada, have started including physical literacy messaging to help reduce the burden of chronic health conditions and improve overall health.

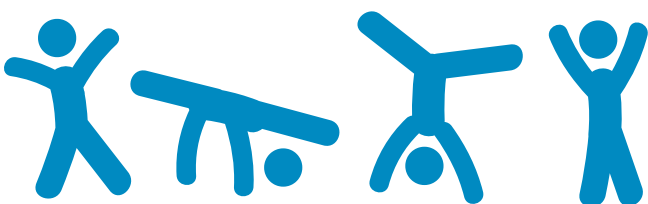
What Exactly Is Physical Literacy?

Physical literacy is a nuanced and holistic concept. Whereas physical activity is “any bodily movement produced by the skeletal muscles that require energy” (PHE Canada, 2023), physical literacy is concerned with a complete version of physical attributes, knowledge, attitudes and behaviours (UN, 2023). Margaret Whitehead, an educator and scholar of physical literacy, provides the gold standard definition:

“[Physical literacy is] the motivation, confidence, physical competence, knowledge and understanding to value and take responsibility for engagement in physical activities for life. (2001).”

Many models of physical literacy exist, however, physical literacy is typically comprised of three key parts:

Affective - Individual attitude and motivation associated with physical activity. This aspect of physical literacy focuses on self-esteem and confidence. Examples include ensuring all participants are given equal play time in team sports, encouraging the development of new skills, and building a positive relationship with activity and movement (Curry, 2020). Several studies have shown that individuals with higher self-esteem are more inclined to engage fully in physical activities than those with lower self-esteem (Edwards et al., 2016). The win-lose dichotomy in many sports is de-emphasized in favour of personal bests, participation, and team building.





Holistic and Life-long

These three categories embody a well-rounded approach to physical activity that balances knowledge with physical movement and activity. [Physical and Health Education Canada](#) states that physically literate individuals can move confidently in various physical activities (2022). Finally, physical literacy is meant to be a life-long journey for people of all ages. You are never too young or too old to improve your physical literacy.

Conclusion

Cognitive and Behavioral - Basic physical literacy knowledge and understanding of how to apply it during any activity. This includes learning the rules and traditions of individual and team sports, but also body awareness (Edwards et al., 2016). Cognitive includes the knowledge and application of knowledge about the role of exercise in a healthy life. Behavioural changes, such as life-long participation in sports and activities will ensure optimal health through aging (Curry, 2020). This core tenet includes “valu[ing] and tak[ing] responsibility for maintaining purposeful physical pursuits/ activities throughout the life course” (Edwards et al., 2016).

Physical - The physical skills and competencies needed for a healthy life. In the physical domain are competencies such as movement capacities, motor skill competence, physical competence, fundamental movement skills and purposeful physical pursuits (Edwards et al., 2016). Physical competence is defined as one’s ability to move with capability in a wide variety of activities, both within a sport but also in daily life (Mandigo et al., 2009). These skills include movement capabilities such as balance, coordination, dexterity, and hand-eye coordination, catching, throwing, running and jumping (Bolger et al., 2018).

Physical literacy is a relatively new concept in physical education, but it has shown promise in improving the health outcomes of Canadians. In addition, there is potential for physical literacy to change some people’s relationships with physical activity and open up inclusive spaces where all persons feel they can improve how they feel about physical activity in a way that works for their bodies.

Physical literacy is associated with better physical and mental health outcomes. For example, several studies have linked physical literacy with reduced diabetes, and overweight and obesity in children (Nyström et al., 2018). Further research indicates that children with high physical literacy have better self-esteem, higher test scores and more stable moods (Jefferies et al., 2019). The skills associated with physical literacy also enable individuals to make beneficial and respectful choices for themselves, others, and their environment (PHE Canada, 2022). The benefits reaped from physical literacy, similar to other kinds of literacy, should be considered through the lens of personal and social responsibility (Mandigo et al., 2009).

It sounds like a win-win for everyone!



To Learn More:

[Physical Literacy Canada](#) is an excellent resource for everyone, from individuals looking to improve their physical literacy to educators, coaches and teachers interested in promoting physical literacy in students and athletes.

If you are interested in Alberta-specific resources, see the [Active For Life website](#) or the [Active For Life Instagram page](#).

If you are an educator, academic or interested in physical literacy research, see the position paper for educators [here](#)

Carrie-Anne Cyre, MPH, is passionate about eliminating food security and poverty in our local communities. Her background in research coordination, humanities, mathematics and knowledge of scientific processes makes her a strong addition to any research team. When she's not helping teams knock out award-winning research, Carrie-Anne loves to volunteer, travel, read books and enjoy the outdoors. Carrie-Anne is a lifelong learner, terrible surfer, and lover of all animals and nature. Carrie is a volunteer with Edmonton Social Planning Council.

For references, click [here](#)





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About the Edmonton Social Planning Council

The Edmonton Social Planning Council is an independent, non-profit, non-partisan social research organization, with registered charitable status. Our focus is social research, particularly in the areas of low-income and poverty. ESPC is a source of knowledge and expertise on social issues within our community.

We are dedicated to encouraging the adoption of equitable social policy, supporting the work of other organizations who are striving to improve the lives of Edmontonians, and educating the public regarding the social issues that impact them on a daily basis.

Our Vision: A community in which all people are full and valued participants.

Our Mission: Through rigorous research, detailed analysis, and community engagement, we deepen community understanding of social planning issues, influence policy, and spark collaborative actions that lead to positive social change.

We thank you for your continued support.

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