I would like to start by extending my deepest appreciation for the Professional Development opportunity through my applications to Literacy Nova Scotia for a PD Grant.

On November 18th, I travelled to Richmond, BC for the Making Sense of a Modern World Literacy Conference hosted by Decoda Literacy. I attended the conference in two capacities, as a delegate and also a presenter.

My experiences kicked off with learning that Decoda Literacy was actually the amalgamation of two literacy networks in BC and that the Literacy Conference is held every two years to be more cost efficient.

The Honourable Andrew Wilkinson, Minister of Advanced Education shared an opening welcome to conference delegates with a few key pieces of information that I found very interesting:

- 87 Community Literacy Organizations share $2.4 million in funding from the BC government
- Each group can apply for a CALP Grant, maximum funding $40,000
- Overview of grant can be found here: [http://www.aved.gov.bc.ca/literacy/docs/2015-16_CALP_Guide.pdf](http://www.aved.gov.bc.ca/literacy/docs/2015-16_CALP_Guide.pdf) this information booklet has a section on Enhancing Administrative Efficiencies whereby in response to recommendations by CALP organizations the Ministry will offer multi-year funding to long standing CALP organizations with proposals that will span three years.

The conference kicked off to a great start with opening remarks from former Mayor of Nelson, BC, Mr. John Dooley. John has an interesting story to share, like so many Canadians he immigrated to Canada in 1967 from Ireland. In Ireland he was employed as a mason sharing that he chose this profession as the profession did not rely on academics (2 parts water to 1 part concrete mix) but on the skill, strength and artistry of the mason to build structures. Like most people living in Northern Ireland he grew up in a world of violence, and had to leave school early to help support his brothers and sisters.

John enjoyed working as a mason and never saw a need to improve his reading and math skills until he immigrated to Canada. For many years after immigrating he found ways to accommodate for his low skills by asking others for help in such a way that they would not know he lacked ability. Even his wife Pat was not aware that he struggled to read and understand even the basic written material.

John talked about his journey, and how his integration into the Irish community helped him find a way to have a fulfilling life while “hiding his secret.” John’s remarks resonated in the room, but the tipping point was when he said “society is okay hearing that someone is not good at math, or even that they do not like it, what they are not okay with is hearing or even understanding that someone might struggle to read.” John urged all Canadians to view literacy as a necessary resource, vital to our economy.

After opening remarks it was off to my first session, Housing Literacy, Opening Doors though Literacy featuring Kate Lambert. Ready to Rent is a unique-in-BC program with three main goals:

- To assist people find and or maintain good housing
- Reduce landlord/tenant conflict, damages and evictions
To increase housing stability

Ready to Rent educates and coaches individuals/families (especially those living on income assistance) to find and maintain their housing. It has three certificate courses:

1. RentSmart Certification
   - Tenant rights and responsibilities
   - Landlord expectations and responsibilities
   - Effective communication
   - Budgeting and planning for housing expenses
   - Maintenance do’s and don’ts
   - Safety and pets
   - R2R also provides “walk with support” by coaching those facing housing challenges to address conflict and resolve issues.
   - RentSmart Certification is recognized in BC by an increasing number of landlords and housing providers as a reference for the rental application.

2. RentReady Youth is a shorter, 3-hour course that focuses on the top 5 things youth need to know to find and keep housing. This program was introduced to specifically help youth transition from government supported care environment to independent living.

3. RentEd is a program for housing providers and landlords who want to be good landlords with long term tenants.

One of the key points Kate stressed was that in the landlord tenant relationship is the only relationship where a person who is purchasing a product or service is always considered to be a fault.

Ready to Rent has a Train-the-Trainer program that builds capacity with community partners to deliver R2R certificate courses themselves in house. Facilitator certification is valid for three years, and recertification is available after completion of a one-day recertification workshop.

The TTT training covers:
   - Best practices in housing stability and homelessness prevention
   - The Ready to Rent prevention and housing stability model
   - Adult education and transformative training principles
   - Curriculum overview, learning objectives and activities
   - Measuring impact
   - Building a movement

Notes: I think the Ready2Rent Train-the-Trainer program would be a great professional development opportunity for many community partners supporting marginalized population groups.

Next up was Credentials for Adult Literacy
Basic adult education programs in Canada lack one key ingredient that is the ability to issue a transcript to clearly demonstrate learner achievements. Decoda Literacy has been working closely with the BC government and the corporate sector to strategize on how best to showcase learner progress before they achieve an Adult High School Diploma or write the GED tests.
The Learner Credential has three main activities:
- Acknowledges and documents learner progress in literacy development
- Measures learner progress in a consistent way across BC using a common and agreed upon benchmark tool
- Recognizes that learning is still individualized and based on individual learner goals.

The agreed upon credential to map learner progress in BC is through Digital Badges (it should be noted that the province of Quebec is interested working with Decoda Literacy to introduce same credential program in their province). Information on Digital Badges can be found at [https://www.macfound.org/videos/395](https://www.macfound.org/videos/395). Digital Badges were chosen as the preferred method to track progress over paper transcript.

This session provided information on the micro-credential for adults in community-based literacy programs, its rationale, feedback from practitioners, and how the credential system is currently set up within the Decoda Literacy provincial learner database.

Decoda Literacy has built Digital Badges for reading, writing, math, communication, information technology, and participation already and industry certifications will be added in. Each Digital Badge awarded states that the holder of the badge (for example) has completed Level 3 in the BC Community Adult Literacy Benchmark Systems Reading domain clearly linking the achievement to the criteria for achieving the Badge and the evidence use to support the accomplishment.

Example:
**Badge Name:** Reading Level 3
**Badge Description:** The holder of this badge has completed level 3 in the BC Community Adult Literacy Benchmark system’s Reading Domain and is able to read, and understand, short, simple paragraphs when the topic is familiar and there are some pictures and diagrams. The text contains some compound and complex sentences, multi-syllable words and unfamiliar vocabulary.

**Analyze**
- Uses appropriate strategies to figure out words (structural analysis)
- Recognize high frequency site words in text and in isolation
- Describe the purpose of comma, colon, semicolon, apostrophes, and brackets
- Locate information in a book or document using appropriate strategies and graphic organizers
- Use the form and structure of poetry to understand it

**Interpret**
- Use content to determine meaning of difficult vocabulary

Decoda Literacy has developed the BC Community Adult Literacy Benchmark System as a way to measure adult literacy learners in community literacy programs. More information on the benchmarks can be found at: [http://decoda.ca/practitioners/adult-literacy-practitioners/community-literacy-benchmarks](http://decoda.ca/practitioners/adult-literacy-practitioners/community-literacy-benchmarks)

After lunch it was off to a session on **Narratives, Videos, and Smart Phones as Literacy Tools** with Sean Muir. Sean Muir is part of the Healthy Aboriginal Network ([http://thehealthyaboriginal.net](http://thehealthyaboriginal.net)) that uses visual resources to promote health, literacy and wellness for aboriginal youth.

Friday morning kicked off with remarks from Ralf St. Clair, Dean of Education, University of Victoria. Unfortunately I missed this presentation as I was setting up to deliver DLN’s Mobilizing Adult Literacy Conference Session.
Mobilizing Adult Literacy in a Blended Learning Environment

It was a real honour to introduce DLN’s Moving On Up eLearning Platform at the Making Sense of a Modern World Literacy Conference. The session lasted 1.5 hours and folks were hesitant to leave the room at the end of it they wanted to learn hear more. The presentation consisted of background information on why we chose to create an eLearning platform, who were our partners, and then we explored the learning modules. Those working in remote area of BC were thrilled to be able to offer their learners an alternative to the traditional instruction model. They were pleased to know that consideration had been taken for those with visual and hearing impairments. Immediately after the session was over I was approached by several of the conference organizers stating that the feedback from DLN’s session was overwhelmingly positive, with many stating it was the best session they had attended.

After morning break it was off to Silver Surfers and Grandparent Learn and Lead

This presentation time slot was split between two groups

Silver Surfers was a program introduced by one Literacy Outreach Coordinator to help older adults engage in the use of technology, specifically tutorials on iPad use. The program was funded through a New Horizons Seniors Grant and while they had a few hiccups to start (retirement home not best place to do workshops) the program is now doing extremely well with over 150 older adults learning to use and iPad since March of 2015.

Grandparents Learn and Lead

This was a remarkable program introduced to help older Chinese speaking adults learn more about Canadian culture. The folks registered in the program (traditionally women) did not speak English and were isolated in the community. The program built on EAL principles while providing these women with a place to gather and learn in friendship. From healthy eating to the value of physical activity literacy concepts were embroiled in every activity. This presentation ended with seven women from the program joining us at the conference to perform a traditional Chinese dance.

After Lunch it was off to Professionalizing the Field

Understanding what it means to be an adult literacy practitioner or literacy outreach coordinator in BC was a key focus of this discussion designed to help those in the field describe the skills, knowledge and experiences to do the work and to be able to describe the career path to anyone who wishes to be a literacy practitioner or literacy outreach coordinator.

An advisory group was established to clarify the work of adult literacy practice and reveal the depth of the adult literacy field. The goals was to capture the diversity of the work being undertaken in adult literacy, incorporate a process where prior learning and work experience are acknowledged, and to strike a balance between rigour and accessibility.

The advisory group researched how adult literacy was described in other jurisdictions around the world. They found a lot of information about the practice of adult education but little on the practice of adult literacy. From here the advisory group moved to develop a competency approach to accreditation. They developed a series of domains for each credential supported by competency statements. A series of credentials were created for Literacy Practitioners and a separate series of credentials was created for Literacy Outreach Coordinators. I was interested to learn that only those working in British Columbia’s college or university programs we referred to as Adult Basic Educators (ABE’s). In addition to attending session, breaks and lunch were spent exploring Human Centred Solutions, Evaluating our Collective Impact and Literacy for Adults with Development Disabilities.

This conference was powerful, thought provoking and truly inspiring. This experience would not have been possible (either as a delegate or conference presenter) without the opportunity to apply for a Professional Development Grant through Literacy Nova Scotia.
All persons, regardless of the extent or severity of their disabilities, have the basic right to use print. Beyond this general right, there are certain literacy rights that should be assured for all persons. These basic rights are:

- The right to an opportunity to learn to read and write. Opportunity involves engagement in active participation in tasks performed with high success.
- The right to have accessible, clear, meaningful, culturally and linguistically appropriate texts at all times. Texts, broadly defined, range from picture books to newspapers to novels, cereal boxes, and electronic documents.
- The right to interact with others while reading, writing or listening to a text. Interaction involves questions, comments, discussions and other communications about or related to the text.
- The right to life choices made available through reading and writing competencies. Life choices include, but are not limited to, employment and employment changes, independence, community participation, and self-advocacy.
- The right to lifelong educational opportunities incorporating literacy instruction and use. Literacy education opportunities, regardless of when they are provided, have potential to provide power that cannot be taken away.
- The right to have teachers and other service providers who are knowledgeable about literacy instruction methods and principles. Methods include but are not limited to instruction, assessment, and the technologies required to make literacy accessible to individuals with disabilities. Principles include, but are not limited to, the beliefs that literacy is learned across places and time, and no person is too disabled to benefit from literacy learning opportunities.
- The right to live and learn in environments that provide varied models of print use. Models are demonstrations of purposeful print use such as reading a recipe, paying bills, sharing a joke, or writing a letter.
- The right to live and learn in environments that maintain the expectations and attitudes that all individuals are literacy learners.