

SASKATCHEWAN ACTION RESEARCH NETWORK (SARN) PROJECT REPORT

PROJECT TITLE: Overcoming the Problem of Childcare/Babysitting for Adult Students.

RESEARCHERS' NAME(S): George Thompson

DELIVERY ORGANIZATION: Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technology (SIIT)

LOCATION(S) OF PROJECT: Moosomin First Nation (2013)

CONTACT for Further Information (E-mails): thompson@siit.sk.ca.

A. OVERVIEW (including outcomes):

Teaching adult basic education on Moosomin First Nation in Northern Saskatchewan had a number of challenges but one of the most difficult, and most consistent, for me was the issue of a lack of childcare/babysitting for my adult students. Many of the students in the classes I was teaching were mothers; many of them had at least one child that often needed to be cared for during the day when they were in class. In the 2 years I taught at Moosomin First Nation, it was most often mothers who had this issue, not fathers.

The pattern was, if a mother could not put her child into a daycare or find a baby sitter, they missed class that day and, if it happened often enough, the student would fall behind, become discouraged and drop out of the class.

At a SARN action research workshop held in the fall of 2012, those at my group's work table came up with a process to arrive at a strategy ("intervention") and I did try that process over the following months. But this "First Cycle" was not successful. Having no real success, the students and I came up with a second intervention idea which was much more successful. Basically, instead of the first

idea of developing a “Daycare/Babysitting Bank” of possible locations that students could contact, I would handle each daycare/babysitting problem as it arose. The intervention went from a simple listing of services to an individualized, customized solution for each mother depending on her individual circumstances.

It therefore took two cycles of action research to work this through, but I saw the baseline September attendance go from 50% average daily before any intervention to 78% by mid-March, 2013. This increase followed not the first, but the second intervention and the implications of this are discussed below. Significantly, we had originally set 75% average attendance for our criterion for success, but the customized approach exceeded this hoped for criterion.

B. QUESTION POSED: How can the lack of childcare/babysitting for a First Nation Adult Basic Education program be addressed?

C. THE INTERVENTION:

- **CYCLE ONE:** Following the SARN action research workshop in Sept 2012, I implemented the following process that had been agreed on at our workshop table:
 1. Meet with my students and have them discuss possible solutions to address the issue of the limited childcare/babysitting for my adult students on Moosomin First Nation.
 2. Based on those discussions, it was decided we would create a “bank” of childcare/babysitting possibilities in the area, and when a student needed to have this service, they would contact a service on that list.
 3. However, this intervention simply did not work. The childcare/babysitting services were either not available when needed; or for various reasons, my adult students were not comfortable or willing to contact the listed services.

CYCLE TWO: By March, 2012, it was obvious that this childcare/babysitting intervention was not working. In consultation with the class, we tried the following new intervention(s):

- I met with the Chief and council and asked them to provide some financial support for childcare/babysitting. They approved \$10.00/day per child.
- Based on our records of student attendance, I then procured three spots for three babies ... for three of our students at the Moosomin Day Care. It was decided that if the student did not show up for class but put their child in the childcare/babysitting, no payment would be made to the childcare/babysitting service.
- With the three spots in place, if a student was absent, I personally contacted her by phone and/or text message. They were helped and advised on how to make use of the childcare/babysitting services available. While cumbersome at the beginning, as I persisted, students began calling me instead and attendance began to turn around on this issue.
- However, if for some reason there was no childcare/babysitting service available on that particular day—possibly because the three seats were being used by other students that day—or if the issue didn't allow for making use of the service (sick baby for instance), discussing the situation during the student's phone call would allow me to discuss the homework that was needed and one of the students would deliver it to the mother's home.
- As a last resort, students brought their children to the class. This was done only occasionally and it proved disruptive for the other students. Not ideal, but better than having a student absent.

- *What I saw was how the student initiative had turned around by some 180 degrees. They were now contacting me and taking the steps needed to deal with this issue.*

C. THE FINDINGS: While we had originally set a criterion for success at 70% daily average attendance—up from 50%— at the SARN workshop, it was the second cycle that actually worked and, as a result, we saw daily attendance rise to 75%.

D. RECOMMENDATIONS & DISCUSSION FOR OTHER PRACTITIONERS:

Teaching on a First Nation First Nation in Northern Saskatchewan has its challenges but, at least in my experience, a lack of childcare/babysitting is a common concern across Adult Basic Education not only on First Nations.

This study lead to a number of conclusions:

1. In this type of teaching context, simply developing a bank of childcare/babysitting services and giving them to the students is not adequate. Either the services are not available on the days students need them or, in this case, students were not always willing to make the contact. Who cares for one's children is not as simple as a phone call; childcare is a complex issue for these learners. Only by dealing one-on-one with my students when the need would arise, and by building a solid level of student-instructor trust, did the second cycle evolve into a regular pattern. That students eventually began calling me was an important finding. We went from information to trust to empowerment.
2. It is recommended, therefore, that trust is needed to deal with those student issues that lie beyond the classroom. Adult education is not the same as k-12 school. The instructor is the key for such issues and, over time, as seen here, greater student self-initiative can be created. Building such self-efficacy can have a lasting impact on an adult student.

- 3. Having (three) sponsored spots available for the class paid for by the band made a huge difference. It is recommended that the instructor not only build trust for issues beyond the classroom, but take the initiative to build the support of the sponsors. In this case, the band council and Chief needed to have a sense of trust for the judgement of the instructor and students. And, further, the band council and/or sponsor should be encouraged to feel a sense of responsibility for the success of the adult education programs. Basic education program success should not all be on the instructor's shoulders. Success needs to be a shared responsibility.**

D. IN CLOSING:

I have since started teaching adult Aboriginal people in an urban setting through a partnership with an agency of tribal councils here in Saskatchewan, but would not hesitate to implement this same strategy if and when the need arises. I recommend other adult basic education instructors consider this strategy if childcare/babysitting is their issue.