Integrating Health and Literacy: Adult Educator's Experiences


NCSALL REPORT #5
August 1998

This exploratory study addresses the experience of adult educators in Massachusetts who have integrated a health unit into adult education classes focused on reading, writing, and communication skill development. Health as a topic area may serve to motivate learners and support critical skill development and, at the same time, offer a venue in which health issues and information can be presented, discussed, and critically analyzed. Such integration of health and literacy must assume that the introduction of health topics into adult learning classes would support existing curricular goals. However, no systematic studies of health projects in adult education programs have been conducted. This study focuses on the teachers' perceptions of advantages and disadvantages of a focus on health.

The participating teachers indicate that health units helped them meet classroom objectives and supported the teaching of reading, writing, vocabulary building, and speaking skills. Teachers note that they value health as a subject of study because of its relevance to learners' lives and that their learners were interested and motivated to read or write on health issues and speak in class or in groups about the subject. Many teachers noted outcomes outside of the classroom as well and highlighted increased activity within the community and reports of learners taking healthful action for themselves.

The findings from this study have implications for program designers and practitioners in the field of education and public health.