

Out-of-school settings for developing critical health literacy in children: a scoping review

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WHAT IS HEALTH LITERACY?

Health literacy is a modifiable determinant of health. It encompasses the knowledge, motivation and capacity to access, understand, appraise and apply health information. What health literacy can enable individuals and communities to do is distributed across functional, interactive, and critical levels. **Critical health literacy** is the action-oriented level. At this level, the upstream factors relevant to health are understood and action is taken to instigate change (Nutbeam, 2000).

PROBLEM

- Fostering health literacy early in the life-course by supporting children to meet their health information needs and take an active involvement in their own and others' health could constitute a reduced risk of poor health outcomes in adulthood (Bröder et al., 2019).
- Functional and interactive health literacy have recently been integrated into some school curricula (Aghazadeh et al., 2020). But critical health literacy for children has not been implemented to the same extent (Sykes and Wills, 2019). Schools – even **WHO Health Promoting Schools** – are not structurally set up to prioritise children's critical consciousness and participation. Interventions piloted in schools are challenged by teachers' limited time and training to deliver health literacy and a teacher-led curriculum which emphasises cognitive skills over social action (St Leger, 2001).
- The possibilities of out-of-school settings for developing critical health literacy capacity-building in children merit further exploration.

APPROACH

A living systematised scoping review was conducted to identify settings for critical health literacy interventions targeted at upper primary school age children. The replicable search strategy used medical subject heading (MeSH) terms and screening and data charting followed the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses extension for Scoping Reviews (PRISMA-ScR) guidelines.

FINDINGS

As of June 2020, 35 out of 41 identified studies were school-based or featured a school-based component. Alternative settings included camps, non-specified settings categorised as 'the community', the home and housing estates, public health departments, pharmacies, universities, and different types of **libraries** (public library; health sciences library; art museum library). Child-accessible libraries emerged as potential settings for developing critical health literacy in children.

IMPLICATIONS

Analysing critical health literacy for children through a settings-based approach affords insights into three understudied aspects: a) the critical dimension of health literacy; b) co-producing health literacy early in the life-course; and c) applying socio-ecological modelling to health literacy. Studying the ways in which libraries as settings facilitate or possibly undermine the development of critical health literacy in children provides insight into children's agency exercised within the social relations of everyday, out-of-school learning environments. This could inform the evidence base for embedding equitable critical health literacy support by and for children in settings beyond school walls.

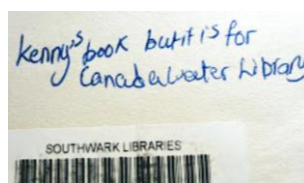
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IMAGE: Page from a children's book found at the local public library.



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