

1.5 Is ESOL Health Literacy EL/Civics??

Is health literacy instruction *civics*??

Yes. Here are some reasons why:

1. Good civic participation requires understanding U.S. society's systems and using them effectively. Health literacy instruction is all about **empowering learners to participate effectively in the health care system and advocate for themselves in health care.**
2. Health care is one of the most complex, challenging, and costly systems in U.S. society. Using it effectively requires understanding the system and patient and provider rights and responsibilities. This knowledge is not intuitive yet is rarely formally taught to health care consumers in the U.S.
3. With U.S. health care costs ballooning and health care reform a national priority, *keeping health care costs down* by accessing and using care effectively and efficiently can be viewed as a civic responsibility.
4. Good health is needed for civic engagement. With good health, people are more likely to be high functioning, engaged, contributing members of society. Without good health, likelihood of civic participation is decreased (think Maslow's hierarchy). Low health literacy is strongly linked to negative health outcomes.

One Virginia program, the Charlottesville Adult Learning Center, explored their understanding of civics in the process of developing a health literacy curriculum:

In creating the health curriculum, we tried to siphon down a definition that would be manageable to implement in a health education setting as well as broad enough to be applicable to other venues. This is what we came up with:

To be effective civics participants in any community requires:

1. Understanding how the system works
2. Understanding one's rights and responsibilities
3. Taking on a sense of participation and/or leadership
4. Engaging in a process of mutual information sharing with others in the community so as to develop and/or modify institutions and processes in ways that will reflect and support all residents

(personal communication with L. Furlong, 6/8/12)



Civics in health involves:

1. Active participation and growth by both students and health care agencies based on a process of mutual collaboration
2. Self-advocacy as a goal in health education
3. A process whereby medical facilities share what they want the public to know and also have the opportunity to learn from the populations they are trying to target

(personal communication with L. Furlong, 6/8/12)

Resources

[Charlottesville Adult Learning Center's EL/Civics Health Curriculum](#)

Healthcare Costs and U.S. Competitiveness

[This 2012 article by Toni Johnson can be found on the Council on Foreign Relations website.](#)

[U.S. Office of Vocational and Adult Education: Civics Education](#)

