

Stakeholder Engagement to Inform Strategies for Improving Breastfeeding Education in Manitoba Schools

Michelle La¹, Leanne Dunne², Lorena Vehling¹ and Meghan B. Azad¹

¹Pediatrics and Child Health, University of Manitoba & Children's Hospital Research Institute of Manitoba, ²George & Fay Yee Centre for Healthcare Innovation, University of Manitoba

INTRODUCTION

Exclusive breastfeeding is recommended for the first 6 months, but **<25%** of Canadian infants achieve this¹.

Social stigma and lack of public support contribute significantly to early breastfeeding cessation^{2,3}.

The majority of breastfeeding education and promotion is targeted towards pregnant women and mothers, with **few resources directed to society at large**⁴.

Educating school children could help normalize breastfeeding and **increase societal support** by fostering a positive perception that breastfeeding is a normal and healthy way for mothers to feed their children.

OBJECTIVE

This ongoing project aims to engage education stakeholders and explore ways to integrate breastfeeding education in the Manitoba school curriculum.



METHODS

A scan of the **existing** Manitoba school curriculum was conducted to identify areas where breastfeeding is addressed or could potentially be integrated.

A search was conducted for breastfeeding education resources used **outside of Manitoba**; their creators were contacted to discuss development and uptake.

Interviews and focus groups with Manitoba education **stakeholders** (teachers, school administrators, curriculum consultants, and policymakers) will be conducted to explore needs, perceptions, preferences and anticipated barriers related to school-based breastfeeding education.

REFERENCES

- ¹Gionet. Breastfeeding trends in Canada. *Health at a Glance*. 2013. Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 82-624-X
- ²Victora et al. (2016). Breastfeeding in the 21st century... The Lancet, 387(10017):475-90.
- ³Sriaman & Kelams (2016). Breastfeeding: What are the Barriers? Why Women Struggle to Achieve Their Goals. *Journal of Women's Health*, 25(7), 714-722
- ⁴Brown (2016). What Do Women Really Want? Lessons for Breastfeeding Promotion and Education. *Breastfeeding Medicine*, 11(3), 102-110.

PRELIMINARY RESULTS

Table 1. Existing breastfeeding education in the Manitoba school curriculum

Grade(s)	Subject	Content	Mandatory for all students
2	Physical Health & Education	Mammalian Biology	Yes
10	Human Ecology (Family Studies)	Infant Feeding	No
K-8	Roots of Empathy	Mother/Baby Visits	No ¹

¹Roots of Empathy is a voluntary program delivered in >200 Manitoba schools. It is mandatory in the St. James School division.

Table 2. Breastfeeding education resources used outside of Manitoba

Name	Developer	Grade(s)	Uptake
Mother's Milk Education Package	Alabama Department of Public Health (USA)	K-12	?
Life's Best Beginning (Figure 1)	Marion County Public Health Department (USA)	Secondary school	Good
Breastfeeding: Education Resource for Schools	Leicestershire Healthy Schools (UK)	Secondary school	?
Breastfeeding Information and Activity Kit (Figure 2)	Ontario Public Health Association Breastfeeding Promotion Workgroup (Canada)	Secondary school	Poor

Breastfeeding education resources



Figure 1. Life's Best Beginning - The Marion County Public Health Department: example of a breastfeeding education resource for school teachers.

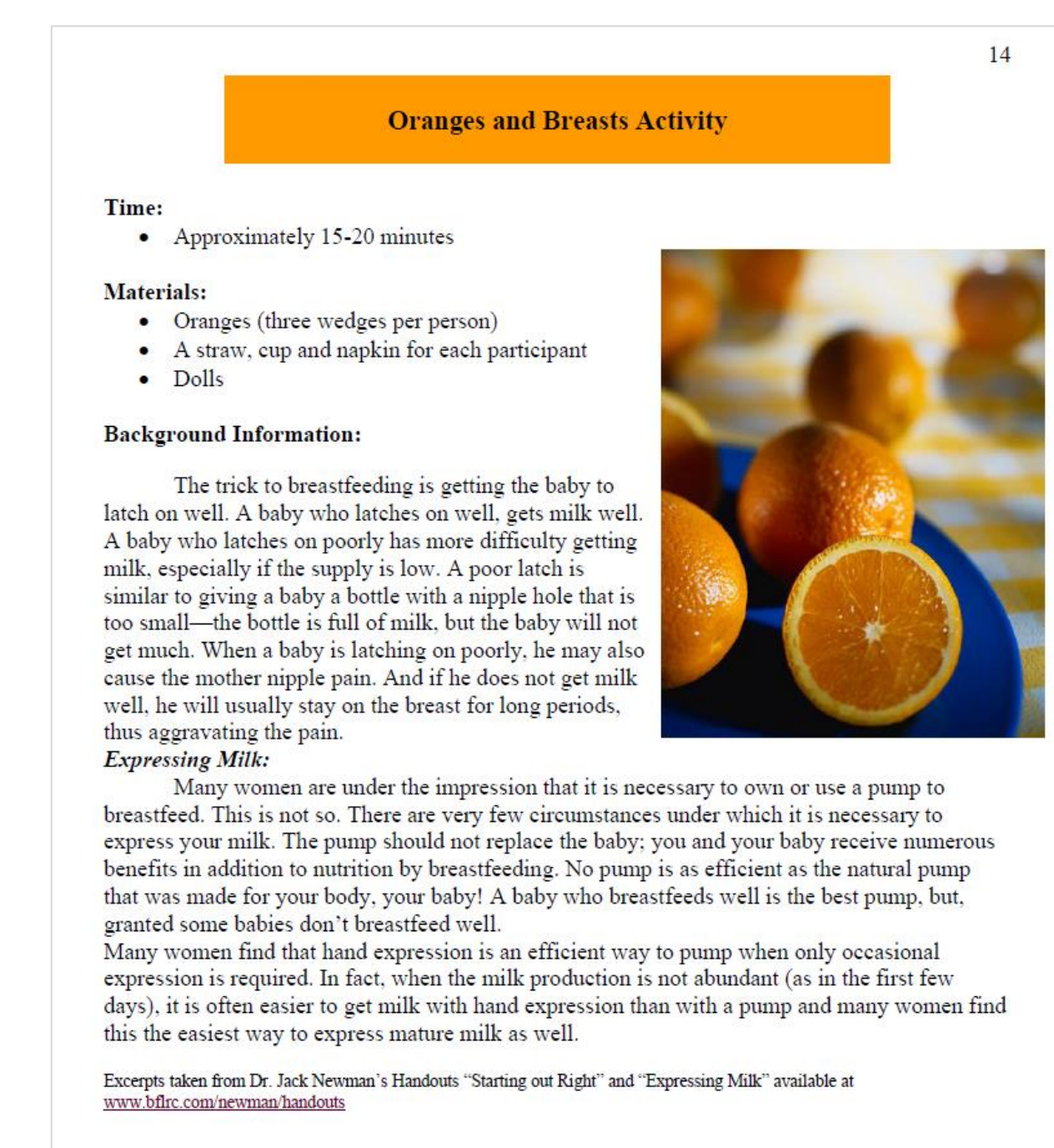


Figure 2. Breastfeeding Information and Activity Kit - Ontario Public Health Association Breastfeeding Promotion Workgroup: example of a breastfeeding education activity.

KEY FINDINGS

Breastfeeding **is not specifically addressed** in the current Manitoba school curriculum: (Table 1)

- Mandatory: **Mammalian biology** in Grade 2
- Optional: **Infant feeding** in Grade 10 Family Studies
- Some schools: **Roots of Empathy** (ROE) brings a mother and baby to classrooms to discuss child development. Breastfeeding is sometimes (inconsistently) discussed.

Four **breastfeeding education resource kits** for schools were identified outside of Manitoba. (Table 2) So far, two developers have been interviewed:

- One reported **good uptake** and emphasized the need for **support** from administrators and teachers.
- One reported a **lack of uptake** due to **insufficient engagement** with educators during development.
- Neither has formally **evaluated** uptake of their resource.

CONCLUSIONS SO FAR

The Manitoba school curriculum does not directly address breastfeeding. Breastfeeding education resources have been developed in other settings, where stakeholder engagement has been essential for uptake.

NEXT STEPS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Next Steps:

Identify & Contact Stakeholders for Focus Groups:

- Local teacher organizations
- Manitoba Dept. of Education & Training
- Physical Health & Education Canada
- Manitoba Healthy Schools
- Public Health Nurses

Assess level of **interest** and perceived **barriers** towards breastfeeding education

Identify preferred **opportunities** and **approaches** for breastfeeding education

Focus Group Questions for Education Stakeholders:

- Should children learn about breastfeeding at school?
- What barriers are perceived or anticipated regarding breastfeeding education in schools?
- Should teachers themselves, or health professionals deliver breastfeeding education?
- Where could breastfeeding "fit" within the existing school curricula?
- What is the process for changing or developing new curricula in Manitoba?

Possible Future Directions:

Co-develop and evaluate a **breastfeeding education resource kit**.

Educate teachers about **breastfeeding and the science of breastmilk**.

Assemble a team of health care professionals to deliver breastfeeding education in schools.

Ultimate Goal:

Encourage **societal support for breastfeeding**, improve breastfeeding rates and enhance maternal-child health in Manitoba.

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