

Over the next decade Nova Scotia must find new ways to include more individuals and groups in the labour force who are currently marginalized and excluded from full economic and social participation.

A recent study points to impending demographic changes in Nova Scotia that will result in an aging, declining population, dwindling numbers in the traditional labour force ages (15-65) [and] lower labour force participation rates. ¹

Providing effective transition supports and services – with special attention to literacy and skills development issues – is key to this challenge. Currently almost 40% of Nova Scotians do not meet international standards. Yet it is estimated that only a modest 1% improvement in average literacy levels would generate a dramatic 2.5% increase in labour productivity. ²

Currently, many Nova Scotians who lack formal education and training credentials do not regard themselves as ‘learners’ at all. This is certainly the case for adults with literacy challenges. In fact, however limited their formal schooling may have been, these individuals have acquired a significantly wide range of skills and knowledge informally.

My life’s accomplishments are worth more than I gave myself credit for.

~PLAR literacy program participant

The basic premise of the Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition process (referred to as PLAR), is that what a person knows and can do is more important than where or how she or he learned

those things. Accordingly PLAR programs provide well-established and highly effective means to enable individuals to identify, articulate, document and utilize the full range of the skills and knowledge they have acquired through their life and work experience – including their voluntary community/family activities and their recreational, hobby and travel interests – as well as through whatever formal education, training and certification they may have received.

The Canadian Council on Learning calls for the fostering of a new learning culture that goes beyond formal education to encompass all forms of structured and unstructured learning – in the workplace, the community and the home. ³

Working with experienced adult literacy program facilitators and tutors in Nova Scotia, the PLA Centre in Halifax has developed and applied a Portfolio Learning program tailored to meet the needs of adult learners who are striving to improve their literacy and work skills within the context of their overall range of skills and abilities.

In a facilitated group setting, participants work their way through a variety of exercises designed to enable them to fully consider, analyse and recognize the broad array of skills and learning they have acquired. On average this can take between 12-18 sessions, and includes support from individual tutors.

The tangible result is the development of a ‘learning portfolio’ - that is, a documented, comprehensive, well organized and attractively presented record of the complete range of an individual’s skills and abilities. This record of learning and achievement can be used for a variety of purposes (ie: employment,

career advancement, further education and training, etc) and can be revised and updated over time.

I would definitely recommend [PLAR] to other people. Because it does help you to recognize your skills that you have that you normally wouldn't think that was a skill you would put on a resume.
~PLAR program participant

Just as important, however, literacy practitioners and tutors who have incorporated PLAR principles and practices into their work, almost universally note the positive and often dramatic impacts of PLAR in terms of increased confidence, motivation and pride among individual participants. In addition participants demonstrate significant improvements in written and verbal communications and understanding – as a direct result of the PLAR process.

The participants now view themselves as learners who can confidently seek out the kind of training, information or skill they are motivated to acquire.
~PLAR program facilitator/tutor

Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition principles and practices, as an integral part of Literacy, Skills Development and Adult Learning programs, are key components of Nova Scotia's effort to more fully engage currently marginalized individuals and groups in economic and social participation.

I am capable of achieving goals for myself and can continue in better job prospects for myself. I have more confidence and self-esteem.
~PLAR program participant

¹ McNiven, J.D., *The Developing Workforce Problem* (AIMS, Halifax, 2009).p 13

² Coulombe, S., *Literacy Scores, Human Capital and Growth Across 14 OECD Countries* (Stats Can, Ottawa, 2004)

³ Morrissey, M.C., *Achieving Our Potential: An Action Plan for Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition* (CCL, Halifax, 2008)




What is literacy?


Literacy is **the** essential skill.


It is the ability to use printed information to function in society, at work and in the family.


It is the combination of thinking and social skills we need to analyze and use information to control our own lives, achieve our goals and develop our knowledge and potential.

How to reach us...

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