

Purposeful Literacies Through Informal Learning

A Resource for Literacy Practitioners

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Partnerships in Learning

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Introduction



Isn't all literacy purposeful? For literacy practitioners the answer is obvious, but what about our learner's with low literacy skills? Are they aware they possess a wealth of valuable knowledge and skills gained outside an organized setting? Do we think about what knowledge they bring in terms of daily life events as they access our literacy programs?

Individual or group learning, which occurs outside of a formal or non-formal organized setting, is known as informal learning. It can happen anywhere and at anytime. This type of learning is meaningful as it is learning we utilize in our everyday lives. Literacy development plays a significant role in relation to informal learning events. Interestingly, in our research learners were unaware that literacy played a primary role in their daily life events.

The objective of this resource is to assist you in enhancing your understanding of informal learning practices and their importance as it relates to understanding our learners. It will also guide you to further understand barriers to the learning process and assist you to help learners overcome those barriers. Most important you will gain greater knowledge of the assets that your learners have acquired in everyday events,

In our research learners were unaware that literacy played a primary role in their daily life events.

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which are relevant to their life goals. In other words, we will find out what is important to them in terms of learning and how we can help motivate them to engage in further learning.

Within this resource guide you will learn about the project and what we know about informal learning. You will be guided through informal learning practices and daily literacy activities that were relevant to the learners. We will discuss motivations for learning, beliefs and how culture affects our learners. A tool is included to assist you in gathering information about the informal learning practices of learners and we will also look at how all of this information is useful to you as a literacy practitioner.



The Project

The “Informal Learning Practices” project was a two-year project, funded by the National Literacy Secretariat and directed under Maurice Taylor, Partnerships in Learning, in Ottawa. The project engaged five literacy practitioners from community based literacy programs across the country. The five selected were Jane Bolton of the Smithers Community Learning Services, Smithers, BC; Judy Purcell of the Nova Scotia Department of Education, Bridgewater, NS, Andrea Pheasey of The Learning Centre, Edmonton, Alberta; Angela Davis of Ottawa Carleton Catholic School Board, Ottawa, ON and myself, Brenda Wright of the Saint John Learning Exchange, Saint John, N.B.

Quote from a learner. “I want others to know that just because someone can’t read, it does not mean they are not smart.”

The group received training in ethnographic research techniques and returned to their programs as field researchers. Ethnography is a collection of research methods used to compile pertinent information because it focuses on social cultural aspects and the different ways people practice literacy. The researcher then produces a written record based on the key participant. The methods used in this project were an orally administered survey, observations, interviews and the collection of materials.

Ten low literacy skilled adults (IALS Levels 1, 2) who were attending a literacy program or had attended a program were selected to be part



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of the research project and subsequent data collection. The case studies profiled each learner and focused on how they engaged in learning outside of a formal setting. The data collection focused around learning events, which took place in the home, community or the workplace. Ten narratives from the field researchers were written and analyzed.

The data collection revealed insightful information and new awareness around the lives of adults with low literacy skills. The purpose of sharing the information through this resource guide is to assist and enhance our practice in the field of adult literacy.

Reflection Question

As an instructor, am I aware of the informal learning that happens in the lives of learners outside of the literacy program or organized group?

What Do We Know About Informal Learning?



Informal learning is most often discussed in three categories: self-directed, incidental and socialization or tacit learning. Self-directed is described as undertaking a project where you expect to gain new knowledge. An example might be building a veranda on your house for the first time.

Incidental is learning that happens but is not deliberate or directly related to the situation. An example of this type of learning could be a facilitator who tutors language training with ESL students and learns how women are viewed as less than equal in the culture where one of her students grew up.

Tacit learning is learning that has happened as a result of the experience of everyday life. It is how we come to hold certain values and it is the learning that shapes our attitudes and beliefs. Often people are unaware that this learning has even occurred but could realize it has after being exposed to a different culture or experience. For example, an instructor may have different expectations of male and female students and unknowingly treats them differently. Neither party is aware of the impact the hidden agenda plays in relation to their social roles as male and female.

As previously indicated, informal learning can take place anywhere, at anytime and at any age. Informal learning can also be an unintentional result of formal education such as developing beliefs on a social issue which you have been learning about in the classroom. Informal learning can happen individually or through a group.



Self-directed learning

Goal: Fix car

- ◆ Library
- ◆ Car Manual
- ◆ Photocopy page
- ◆ Searches for best price on parts
- ◆ Completes car repair

A learner uses the library as a resource for a self-directed learning project. He is familiar with the library as he accessed it regularly while attending a local literacy program. He finds a specific car manual to help him with his project. The manual has pictures and visual prompts so he is able to look at how something fits together and what parts or pieces belong with it. Since the manual is a resource book it

cannot be removed from the library, so the learner photocopies the page he needs to take home. He has mastered reading the text from the Table of Contents, and is able to locate the page number required. All of the knowledge gained in this illustration was self-directed and happened outside an organized setting, hence informal learning. He then proceeds to use the telephone book to call around for the best part and then makes the repair.

Reflection Question

Upon reflection, are you aware of any tacit learning that has occurred for you as a literacy instructor?



Informal Learning Through Everyday Literacy

Literacy is socially embedded in the daily lives of our learners regardless of whether they are aware of it or not. Therefore literacy is often acquired through informal types of learning. Cooking, home improvement projects, workplace procedures, fixing a car, finding a new place to live, all involve literacy in some aspect. Learners are often surprised to hear us refer to these everyday activities as literacy activities. Literacy awareness can change as people develop their learning potential.

One learner was able to find out how to apply and obtain a place to rent in the local Housing Co-op by asking the right questions to the right people. This type of informal learning enabled her to acquire a more suitable apartment to meet her families needs for a substantial amount less than she was paying previously. This allowed the family additional money to purchase food.

One learner was able to find out how to apply and obtain a place to rent through a local Co-op by asking the right questions to the right people.

Reading and writing has purpose for the learner when it is linked with a life situation like checking the weekly flyer for bargains, making a grocery list, checking children's homework, paying bills, putting a complaint into a landlord, organizing a community committee, painting their home. A learner, who enjoys cooking, observed his brother making spaghetti sauce. He makes the sauce without the use of a recipe, as he likes his sauce to be different every time and not the same as his



brothers. These are some of the numerous ways literacy is used to accomplish daily living goals.

Everyday Literacy

- ◆ checking weekly flyers
- ◆ making a grocery list
- ◆ checking children's homework
- ◆ paying bills
- ◆ organizing a committee

Everyday literacy is purposeful and practical. It assists learners to acquire additional skills and abilities that are reflective of their needs. Our findings suggest that learners with low literacy skills have a desire to learn and improve new skills. They are indeed committed to continuous learning when it is linked to everyday living projects and areas of interests, such as helping out in the community.

Our learner's ideas around literacy have too often been linked with past reminders of failure or a sense of negative perceptions linked to unsuccessful academic experiences. It is important that practitioners assist learners to understand how they have already been successful with literacy and learning in their daily lives.

Most of our learners liked having a sense of control around their learning. The freedom to learn on their own terms and in their own way was referred to directly or indirectly in all of our stories. Providing choices and giving up position power are the two effective ways to assist learners to have control over their learning.

Reflection Question

As an instructor, am I aware of how literacy is embedded in the everyday activities of my learners?



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on the family car while another searched on the computer with her daughter. The home environment was a rich learning environment.

These types of events are everyday happenings in learners' lives. Literacy is a component, however not always the main element of focus, as it might be in a formal classroom setting.

Observing the learners engaging in literacy events revealed numerous skills and strengths that they possessed, and were different to those the field researchers had been exposed to in their program interactions. These observations facilitated a whole new awareness of assets and respect for the unrecognized abilities of these learners.

As reflected in one of the learner stories, life situations provided a basis for further learning. Can we create literacy events in our programs where the capacity of our learners' abilities could be recognized? Think about these suggestions.

Your class could attend a community event, which is of interest to the group, or you might visit your local grocery store to initiate a dialogue on budgeting or healthy eating. Ask your learner's to collage their interests or life histories that elicits discussion, or start a classroom garden, which your learners could be responsible for. Brainstorm current or historical events that they may want to do some reporting on. Redecorate and repaint your classroom. Whatever the event, allow your learners to lead with their choices.

Reflection Question

Are you aware of what literacy events are happening in your learners' everyday lives?

Informal Learning Strategies



When observing and interviewing our learners we noticed that patterns emerged on how they learn outside of a formal setting or classroom. Prior knowledge was often used to transfer learning from one situation to another. For instance, one participant had to repair an air purifying system at work. One of his hobbies was working on cars, so he used what he knew about fixing cars to repair the air purifying system successfully.

Another noticeable pattern was one of learning by doing or trial and error. Often learners would accomplish certain tasks such as cooking or installing a doorbell just by doing it and figuring it out as they proceeded. One individual, when first beginning to make gravy, would pour too much flour in. Through learning and trying out different portions she now knows how much flour to put in the broth.

Observation was another key learning strategy. Often participants would watch someone demonstrate how to accomplish a task, such as repairing a car. Television shows were also used to observe and learn new skills. Learners watched television shows to learn about home projects, how to live a healthier life style, parenting, gardening and other topics of interest. One learner learned to use a cell phone by taking it to the Telephone Company and asking one of the employees to show her how to use it.

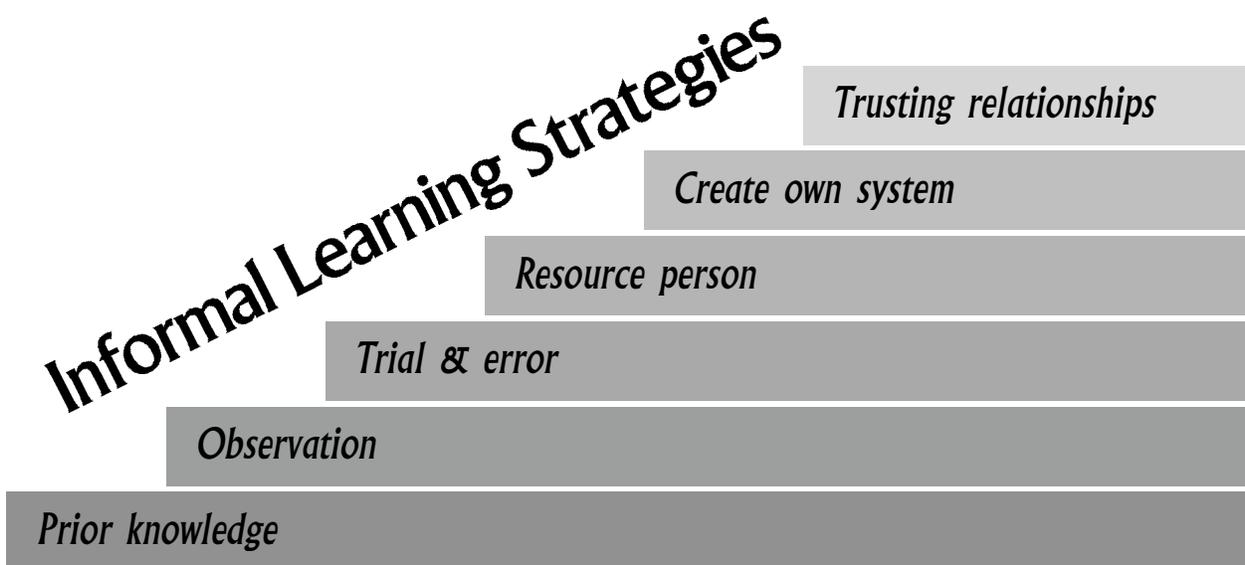
Some learners developed their own system for coping with written materials. One learner memorized certain graphics or fonts, to allow



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him to recognize a title on a compact music disc. This particular learner also colour-coded tally sheets that were central to his volunteer job.

In addition, participants had established a resource person or group who would help them if they needed additional knowledge or assistance. This ranged from someone in their family who had graduated from high school and could assist children with a homework assignment, to a person at work who would help complete written reports for them. Central in this process was the element of trust. As a note of interest many of the learners had developed a keen sense or intuition about whom they could trust.





Informal Learning Strategies and the Practice of Literacy Skills

There was a common thread that arose from the research with our learners in trying to understand what types of literacy skills they were practicing through informal learning events. One of the most interesting insights revealed that these groups of adults with low literacy skills possessed strong oral communication skills. They used those skills to make connections with other people and to solicit the information they needed for a particular life situation or gain new information from a variety of sources.

Relies on their strength and skill to problem solve and get things accomplished in every day events.

Most often they relied on their strength in communication to problem solve everyday life events and get things accomplished. Interestingly, most of our learners portrayed a social side of themselves that was not evident in formal learning situations. For instance, one learner phoned various stores to find the best price on repair parts that were needed to fix a small appliance.

**Practice of oral
communication
skills**

Other examples of using oral communication skills were evident when one learner received a business letter in the mail. She called the com-



Practice of seeking out multiple sources for information.

pany or government office to find out what the letter was about and what she was required to do by asking them over the phone. Another learner used his communication skills to seek out multiple sources for the information he needs to accomplish his goal of applying for a disability pension.

Reflection Question

As an instructor, what skills and strengths do your learners utilize to problem solve or gain information?



The Desire to Learn

Motivations and influences to learn were as numerous as were the participants in this project. Often parents would engage in learning because their children were involved with a school project. One parent purchased a book on the subject of study for their child. Another parent volunteered at their child's school, in the breakfast program, and as a result new literacy skills were acquired.

Motivation to assist family members with problems or activities also arose. Things such as learning to repair the family car so it was safe to drive, or fix an appliance to help out with finances were discussed. Dealing with the bills and assisting with medical information allowed one person more status in their non-traditional family. Status among peers was also a motivator to volunteer regularly at a community event in order to learn one of the jobs that was considered influential in their community circle.

Most learners possessed a mature social conscience, which acted as a motivator. In one instance, a learner attempted to set up and look after a community garbage collection program. Another wanted to give back to the community in which she had grown up in and is now raising her family by volunteering and helping to make her neighbourhood a more family oriented area. One individual was motivated to learn how the government operates which would allow him to be more engaged as an active citizen.

Quote from an interview

“What was the most important skill or knowledge you gained through your volunteer activities, I asked?” The learner replied, “That I can give back or help out.”



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One learner, who attended a literacy program, was motivated to practice her literacy skills through learning different volunteer roles. She believes these activities will help her find a job. The more skills and confidence she gains the more she is willing to step outside the box and challenge herself.

One of her volunteer roles is at the breakfast program, which is held at the local elementary school. Since working with this program she has enhanced her literacy skills by making lists for the weekly grocery orders. She takes an inventory of what is needed and makes a list by looking at the orange juice or cereal box and copying it down on a sheet of paper. She then submits the list to the teacher responsible for purchasing the food.

She also volunteers at the Salvation Army Hostel where she serves food to people who are homeless and need a safe place to stay. Through learning how to perform these duties she feels she had improved her people and communication skills, and therefore has gained confidence in her abilities. Overall her volunteer experiences have been empowering and she feels that she can contribute to her community by “helping out and giving back.”

Gaining confidence in social activities and increasing her social circle was recognized as a motivator for one learner. Through a book launch event she overcame her fear and gained the confidence to display and discuss her writing at the event, something she would not do in the formal literacy class. Her confidence then led her to attend a publication launch where she continued to develop her new confidence and skills. Developing a social network helped her to feel she was part of society instead of someone who is just surviving it.

Reflection Question

Are you aware of what motivations and influences encourage or engage your learners in the learning process?



The Power of Beliefs

Beliefs are formed from past experiences and realities. As revealed in the research when negative experiences and events occur, the effects are long lasting. Many of the negative experiences were linked to a lack of competence in reading and writing, and a distrust of formal systems where you could pass or fail.

Fear of failure was a reoccurring theme in all of the narratives. Learners were not willing to be put in a position where they would be evaluated in terms of their reading and writing skills. One learner, who gets overwhelmed by print materials, continues learning by undertaking new home improvement projects. Dealing with paper made him so nervous he unconsciously has adapted his life to manage without paperwork. The field researcher recognized that this fear contributed to the learner's ability to show up for his tutoring sessions.

A learner who had lost custody of her child due to the fact that she read the court documents incorrectly shut out all interactions involving reading and written documents. The residue of this heartbreaking experience has virtually detached this person from further learning. Learning only occurs when necessary and is unintentional. From the outside this individual might look like someone who is just simply unwilling to learn out of lack of interest. This is an unfortunate example of how situations are not always as they seem and serves as a reminder to take an open-minded non-judgmental approach when working with learners.

Dealing with paper made him so nervous he unconsciously has adapted his life to manage without it.

“As she could not read the document, she relied on the belief in her abilities.”

Instructor quote

Sometimes beliefs are influenced by life circumstances. For instance, if a learner grew up where attaining employment outweighed finishing education due to the lack of household income, this could possibly shape a learner’s attitude towards learning.

Of course not all beliefs are negative, one of the learners believed in her ability to communicate and interact positively with individuals. This belief led her to take charge of most of the problem solving for her family. This included gathering new information and adapting her literacy skills to negotiate a utility bill solution with a large corporation. Even though she could not read the document she relied on the belief in her abilities to overcome the challenge.

A learner who wants to own his auto body repair shop has been attending a literacy program for two years. This is his dream and he believes he can accomplish his dream as he has attained substantial knowledge in his area of interest through informal learning activities. He is motivated to gain the necessary literacy skills in order to go to a community college so he can learn auto repair.

Successful learning events in the home or the neighbourhood were helpful in assisting these adults to overcome some of their negative beliefs. Once new learning in the home or the neighborhood occurred, confidence was gained and in turn provided motivation for the individual to continue learning. This is an equally important aspect in our literacy programs. By setting learners up to be successful with their learning activities we will encourage continued participation in the learning process.

Reflection Question

Are you aware of any positive or negative beliefs that your learners hold in regards to learning and literacy?



The Role of Culture in Shaping Informal Learning

Take a moment to ponder the role of culture in your own life. The culture you are exposed to plays a significant role in shaping who you are as a person. What do you value? Where do you live? What kind of clothes do you wear? Where do you shop? What is important to you? Now take a moment to ponder the culture your learners have been living in. Is it different from yours? What do you know about it?

We experience different cultures in different environments, such as work, home and community. For most of us home is usually a dominant culture, as it is where you develop a social identity. These cultures are where we learn and use different literacies. You would most likely act, use spoken communication and written materials differently within each of these areas.

Some cultures have different philosophies or ways of living, like an aboriginal community. Spoken language is a significant part of that culture so it is not surprising that one of the aboriginal learners profiled attained most of his information by communicating orally.

Often we find unique cultures as they relate to a specific neighbourhood or community. For instance, one learner attended a literacy program at a co-op where a number of agencies are housed. Many of his friends were associated with the co-op and volunteered there on a regular basis. Volunteering was part of the culture for those who frequent the co-op and where there

Culture is where you develop a social identity.



was a certain status associated with certain volunteer jobs. The field researcher referred to this as a “volunteer hierarchy.”

The learner was identified as a “good guy” because of his volunteer activities at the co-op, particularly his involvement with the Bingo hall. This identity had value for him within this culture. His job was as an Odd/Even Controller who works with two types of tally sheets. On the colour-coded sheets, which help to keep the bingo games separated, he noted the bingo card sellers’ names and the number of cards they had, plus the amount of money that was turned in. He counted the money not by value, but by the number of bills the sellers gave him. As his reading skills were very low, the learner had memorized where the information should be inserted on the sheets. The colour-coding helped him with the identification. This involved trusting relationships with the sellers, the learner and the Bingo floor manager, who were all connected to the transactions. When he was not sure, there were specific individuals whom he trusted and he could ask for help.

This learner had established himself in his community and was not interested in moving anywhere else. He acquired new skills through learning the volunteer job which enhanced his opportunities of taking on another volunteer job at the co-op. All of this gave him additional status.

Status is an important aspect within specific cultures like volunteering.

Another example of a unique culture inside a community was a learner who was living with a group of adults, none of whom were related; however all were considered family. They operated much the same as a traditional

family by supporting each other. This learner had taken a leadership role within the family that had given her status such as dealing with bill payments, looking for suitable housing and organizing medical care for one of the family members. She learned how to do these tasks infor-

The Role of Culture

mally and now wants to learn how to use things such as interact and banking machines because the knowledge will provide her with enhanced status and independence within her family.

A learner, who was a single mother of three children and a grandmother as well, focused most of her activities around her family and community. She had strong roots in this community as it is where she grew up and has raised her children. She felt a sense of pride about learning how to give back to her community by volunteering. The neighbourhood was a large part of her life and she felt a responsibility to help make her community a better place to live. She indicated she would stay in the neighbourhood rather than move to an another part of town. She has made strong connections and developed lasting relationships in her culture. She said, “This is where I want to live.”

The role of family culture continues to surface as a strong connection to informal learning. In some family cultures, extended family such as brother-in-laws, uncles and grandparents play a key role. One learner who held a deep respect for his grandfather valued the informal learning on outdoor living that occurred on family hunting trips. He had learned how to cook and survive in the outdoors, what to do if he were to get lost in the woods and things you can do to prevent you from getting lost. Hunting, fishing and the outdoor living were very much a part of this family culture.

The workplace is another important cultural setting. For instance, in a workplace that values education, you may see a workplace education program that welcomes employee input. There may be opportunities for employees to share their knowledge, take risks and develop their leadership abilities, as in one workplace where participating in an education committee was observed. This culture provided a rich environment for informal learning to take place and for employees to enhance their confidence to learn in their home and community life. Obviously a workplace culture that values learning, reaps many rewards.



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As illustrated in these examples, the role of culture as it relates to learning is significant. A culture can enhance learning for an individual or stifle it.

Reflection Question

How does culture influence the types of informal learning that occurs with your learners inside and outside the classroom?



Transforming Our Practice

Our learners—what do we really know of them other than they have literacy issues? As we have multiple roles in our everyday life such as the role of parent, spouse, friend, sibling, educator, involved citizen and adult, our learners have multi-life roles as well. In our research, learners often found it difficult to articulate certain aspects of these roles. The opportunity to observe, ask questions and interact with learners outside of the usual formal setting allowed the field researchers to see learners in a whole new light. We were often surprised and delighted with our new awareness.

What do we know about our learners other than they have low literacy skills?

Practitioners can be field researchers and use ethnographic techniques of interviewing, observing and collecting artifacts with learners. You can also become a participant observer when you are collecting information about your learners. Through this process, a relationship of trust is developed and learner profiles should be kept confidential.

Begin by thinking about facilitating activities that allow different aspects of the learner to be revealed in a safe, non-judgmental environment. Talk with them about their interests outside of the classroom. This will help you to choose activities where they can share their knowledge. The majority of learners in our research were extremely willing and pleased to share their knowledge about their learning lives. What really stood out was that they were learning from daily literacy events.



A few ideas for class activities are; let them organize or assist in organizing an event, interest group, or outing for the class. You can introduce the idea of role-plays with small acting jobs where they can play different community roles such as the City Mayor or community spokesperson debating an issue from the actor's perspective. Arrange to volunteer as a group to help out another community agency, perhaps

What activities do learners engage in as members of their communities?

they have some ideas about who needs assistance. Another finding in our research was that learners really became engaged when they were given the opportunity to give back to their community. They often displayed the same type of satisfaction from a volunteer role that many of us attain from our careers.

Ask them to collage their ideal career choice, favorite hobby or volunteer job. Have them participate in a project where a mock business is created. Let them discover the many different aspects of operating an organization. As you can see there are many ways, to be creative, learn and have fun!

It is important to ask your learners questions about their previous informal learning activities or experiences to gain a greater perspective in terms of knowledge and understanding. Good questions are useful not only to the practitioner but to the learner as well. It allows the learner to begin the process of thinking about their knowledge in a reflective manner. Some examples of questions might be; what knowledge do you have about this issue? How did you learn about that? Why does it matter to you?

Additional questions could be linked to what activities learners engage in as members of their communities? What have they learned at home or at work, that was not part of a formal education experience? How do they enjoy spending time doing outside of class? What kind of hobby, volunteer role or job have they had or would like to attempt? Ask open-ended questions that are respectful of the relationship you have developed with them.

Ask them about how they learn outside of the classroom. How did they learn to make bookshelves? How did they find out about a particular apartment? How did they learn to fix cars? Who do they ask when they have a question about reading? What types of television shows do they watch? These types of questions allow you to recognize patterns of informal learning.

You can also collect materials that will assist you in understanding how these use resources. What types of weekly flyers do they look at? Could they bring one to class? Which recipes are they trying this week, could they copy it down and bring it in next week? What does their dog look like? Do they have a picture they could share with the class? Can they bring in an article they saw about an important issue so we can photocopy it? These are all ways to collect artifacts.

In the next pages, you will find an **Informal Learning Information Inventory** that could be used in your program as you conduct the intake process with your learners.

Reflection Question

What kinds of things could I be doing with my learners that would assist me to have additional awareness about their informal learning practices?



Informal Learning Information Inventory

- 1. What is the literacy level of my learner as it relates to the International Adult Literacy Survey or your own provincial benchmarks?

- 2. Why did this learner decide to come to a literacy program?

_____ Work related _____ Family related
_____ Community related _____ Other

Describe _____

- 3. What appears to be the most significant role in their life?

_____ Family _____ Community
_____ Work _____ Volunteer
_____ Other



Describe _____



4. What types of activities do they do in their different life roles?

_____ Family

_____ Work

_____ Volunteer

_____ Hobbies

_____ Peer group

Describe _____



5. Do they watch television or listen to the radio? _____

What do they watch or listen to? _____

Why do they watch or listen to these programs? _____

Informal Learning Information Inventory

 **6.** What type of learning events or projects have they been involved with over the past six months?

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Health | <input type="checkbox"/> Personal Development |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Hobby | <input type="checkbox"/> Social Skills |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Home Improvement | <input type="checkbox"/> New Residence |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Pet | <input type="checkbox"/> Volunteer Role |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Community Event | <input type="checkbox"/> Sports |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Child's Project | <input type="checkbox"/> Budget/Bills |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Spirituality | <input type="checkbox"/> Cultural Activities |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other | |

Describe _____

 **7.** What new knowledge or information was gained from any of the above-mentioned experiences?

Describe _____



8. How have they utilized the information which was gained from the experience of the learning event or project?

- _____ Shared with someone else
- _____ Helped them with other situations
- _____ Wanted to learn more
- _____ Did learn more
- _____ Learned something else new
- _____ Developed new friendships or acquaintances

Describe _____



9. What traditions or customs does this learner have? _____



10. Ask the learner what they feel helps them to learn something new?

- _____ Trying it
- _____ Talking it over with someone
- _____ Watching someone else do it
- _____ Asking questions
- _____ Trial & Error
- _____ Other

Informal Learning Information Inventory

Describe _____

11. What keeps them from learning something new?

- _____ Not sure if they can do it
- _____ Afraid they might do it wrong
- _____ Afraid of something else
- _____ Not interested
- _____ Believe they cannot learn
- _____ No Support
- _____ Other

Describe _____

12. If none of those barriers existed what would they like to learn

more about? _____



13. What past experiences or feelings do they associate with their

formal education such as school? _____



14. What is their literacy goal?

_____ Ability to help children _____ Gain employment

_____ Help out in their community _____ Self development

_____ Live a healthier lifestyle _____ Gain confidence

_____ Citizenship _____ Gain status

_____ Improve quality of life _____ Other

Describe _____



Purposeful Literacies Through Informal Learning

As literacy practitioners we observe the value our learners gain from coming to a literacy program and the positive effect it has on other areas of their lives. Have we ever thought about how learning that happens outside the classroom affects learners when they attend a literacy program? What knowledge and skills can we build on to help learners be successful in the classroom?

Gaining knowledge of learners from a holistic perspective will enable practitioners to help learners overcome negative beliefs and fears. We might use this knowledge to develop a sense of where they are in terms of learning readiness and involve them in the process with guided choices. Being objective and non-judgmental about resistance is important as it may take some time for learners to transform negative beliefs and fears. Try to introduce ideas to support their learning patterns. Think about building on strengths like oral communication skills and encourage them to develop new literacy skills.

The information and skills they acquire, sometimes unknowingly, assists them to live their everyday lives. This is how informal learning happens.

Being respectful of their culture may lead to an awareness of the influence it has over some of their choices. Using materials that are relevant to their everyday situations and interests will increase motivation and the desire to learn. Be a learner yourself and allow your learners to



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share the knowledge they have gained with you. Remember that learning happens anytime and anywhere.

Cultivate an open mind around how to facilitate learning with your learners. Try new ideas and ask your learners for their input. Keep in mind that your values may differ from those of your learners due to different cultures and life experience.

Most practitioners have encountered a learner who is dealing with many difficult life circumstances. Assist by providing them with information and resources to cope with their situation. Resist taking away from them the opportunity to solve their own problem.

One of the key findings in our research was the discovery that adults with low literacy skills find creative solutions to everyday problems and events. They live authentic, fulfilling lives. They possess a multitude of strengths and abilities to problem solve and make connections to previous learning. The information and skills they acquire, sometimes unknowingly, assists them to live their everyday lives. This is how informal learning happens. If we build on this knowledge in our literacy programs, we can assist students to recognize themselves as lifelong learners in pursuit of their important life goals.



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