



Barriers to Participation

Presenter: Dorothy MacKeracher



Research areas reviewed

- Barriers to participation
- Elements of a responsive lifelong learning system
- Best practices in teaching



Criteria for inclusion

- 1991 or later
- “barrier” or “access” in abstract
- Canadian
- Avoided literature covered by another research team or knowledge centre



Groups included

- Older adults
- Adults with sensory, mobility or learning disabilities
- Immigrants and refugees



General comments on literature

- Focuses on participants; very little on non-participants
- Categories of barriers describe difficulties for participants; also reasons for non-participation
- Non-participation viewed as “problem” as are non-participants
- Categories are poorly defined and do not serve low-participating groups very well
- Someone must be responsible

Participation rates

- Adult Education and Training Survey (AETS) (2005)
 - 37% of adults participate in formal learning
- New Approaches to Lifelong Learning Survey (NALL) (1999)
 - 96% of adults participate in informal learning
- Possible conclusion – 59% of participants engaged in informal learning are not attending formal educational and training programs.



Participants in formal learning

- Those who have higher education levels
- Those who have already participated
- Persons between 18 and 50 years
- In workplace,
 - Men participate more than women
 - High wage workers more than low wage
 - Full-time workers more than part-time
 - Employees in large organizations more than small
 - Canadian-born workers more than immigrants



Non-participants in formal learning

- Low levels of literacy
- Low levels of education
- Immigrants and refugees
- Persons over 50 years
- Persons with sensory, mobility, and learning disabilities
- Persons with a poor concept of self-as-learner and/or low self-esteem

Participants in informal learning

- The NALL Survey indicates no significant differences in time spent on informal learning activities based on:
 - ☐ gender
 - ☐ age
 - ☐ race
 - ☐ ethnicity
 - ☐ language
 - ☐ education level
 - ☐ literacy skills



Categories of barriers

- Institutional
- Situational
- Attitudinal
- Academic
- Pedagogic or teaching
- Workplace training



Institutional barriers

- Financial support; cost of education
- Transportation support
- Childcare support
- Recognition of prior learning & credentials
- Negative attitudes toward adult learners
- Academic and student support services
- Poor scheduling
- Poor access to buildings and parking
- Lack of information



Situational barriers

- Multiple work and family responsibilities
- Financial problems
- Childcare problems
- Job commitments, conflict with work
- Transportation problems
- Disabilities
- Poor health
- No time



Attitudinal barriers

- Low self-esteem
- Personal goals
- Feeling stigmatised
- Feeling isolated
- Past experiences
- Self-as-learner



Academic barriers

- Literacy skills
- Numeracy skills
- Computer skills
- Accessing information
- Critical and reflective thinking
- Attention and memory
- Writing exams, test, essays
- Skills decline when not used



Pedagogic or teaching barriers

- Adult learning principles and strategies
- Need for interpersonal interaction
- Diversity of learners
- Time limits
- Prior knowledge and experience
- Situation and materials not relevant to adult needs



More pedagogical barriers

- Over-inflated expectations by educators
- Attributing failure to learner flaws
- Poor feedback to learners
- Lack of support and infrastructure for technology-based programs
- Lack of understanding of the learner's culture
- Instructors not trained in learner-centred teaching methods



Workplace training barriers

- Attitude of employer about providing training
- Understanding of benefits and costs
- Nature of low wage jobs
- Conflict between re-structuring and re-training
- Loss of productivity for employer; loss of wages for employee




Elements of a responsive lifelong learning system

- Recognize needs of adult learners not same as traditional students
- Credit for prior learning
- Support for adult learners
- Flexible scheduling
- Diverse types of learning opportunities




More elements ...


- Accessible and available learning opportunities
- Respectful of adult learners
- Relevant and applicable content
- Learner-centred
- Coordinated and integrated
- Cooperative and collaborative





Major gaps in knowledge and potential lines of inquiry


- Perceived and actual barriers experienced by non-participants in relation to learning opportunities

- 
- Differences between formal and informal learning
 - Differences between intentional and incidental informal learning

- 
- Potential role of formal educational institutions in supporting and recognizing informal learning activities and outcomes
 - Barriers associated with informal learning for different groups of learners

- 
- Economic benefits of informal learning
 - Interactions among various types of barriers

- 
- Changes in barriers over a transition period
 - Personal identity as a learner

- 
- Alternative methods for assisting learners to fund formal and informal learning activities



■ Application of existing knowledge


- Why aren't administrators and facilitators using existing knowledge about adult learning and adult learners?
- Why don't we have user-friendly and readable publications about adult learning and adult learners?
- How could we share information about best practices in the design and delivery of learning activities?

- 
- Integration among different services that support learning opportunities



Some additional problems in the literature

- Idea that participation is good; non-participation is bad
- Idea that we can “fix” barriers if we just try hard enough
 - Sometimes this sounds like “fixing the learner”

- 
- Idea that current labels for barriers arise from views of reality held by dominant and privileged groups:
 - some barriers emerge from “ism’s” -- racism, ageism, class-ism, ethnocentrism, gender-ism
 - How would we view barriers if we were not members of the dominant and privileged group?



A Personal Opinion

- Two conditions keep adults from participating in learning opportunities more than anything else:
 - Money
 - Lack of recognition of prior learning – whether formal or informal