# Barriers to Participation

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#### 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 nonparticipants
- Categories are poorly defined and do not serve lowparticipating 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.

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## 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

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#### 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

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#### 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

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#### 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 retraining
- 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

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#### 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

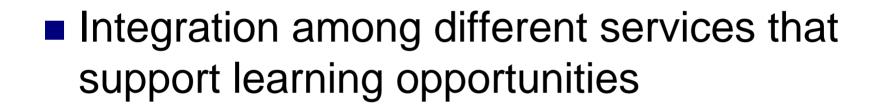
Interactions among various types of barriers ×

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

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



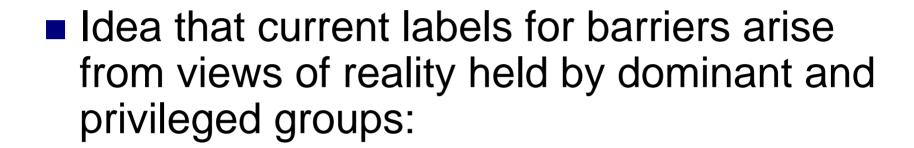
- Why aren't administrators and facilitators using existing knowledge about adult learning and adult learners?
- Why don't we have user-friendly and readable publications about adult learning and adult learners?
- □ How could we share information about best practices in the design and delivery of learning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





## Some additional problems in the literature

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



- 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