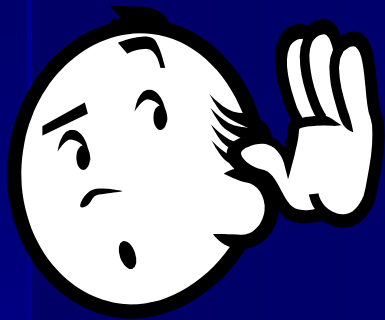# Reviewing the journey . . .

BEYOND PRIOR LEARNING POLICIES

Welcome to this session!

Sit back and listen to the voices of participants in the

Gateways Research Project

Linda . . . On ways of "knowing"

"**I have decided to remain in my education because our world recognizes <u>post secondary education as the way of knowing the world around us</u>**."

Linda continues. . .

"My Indian name means 'helping woman.' My grandmother was a 'helping woman' too. <u>She washed the dead, she brought the babies for the community into the world and she made medicine for people</u>."

"PLAR process was an extremely valuable learning tool for me."

"With the help of my mentor I was able to get the clarity needed."

"PLAR was a great process. It was so very therapeutic."

"**Overall the experience was excellent. Creating the portfolio helped me to critically examine my skills and set goals ."**

"The Gateways Project was not only useful. It was a personal journey. I gained a great deal of knowledge about myself and the many directions my life can go."

"PLAR was a great journey and process. As I was gathering my material and information together. I could not help but grow and embrace the good things I had accomplished."

"It can be adapted to meet the learning needs of any community and is sustainable over time when mentors and assessors are trained to undertake this activity."

"Filling the gaps in learning through PLAR reduces the time and resources needed to increase educational levels in the workforce."

BEYOND PRIOR LEARNING POLICIES
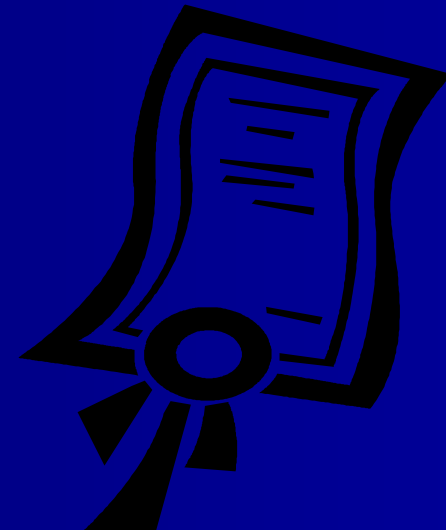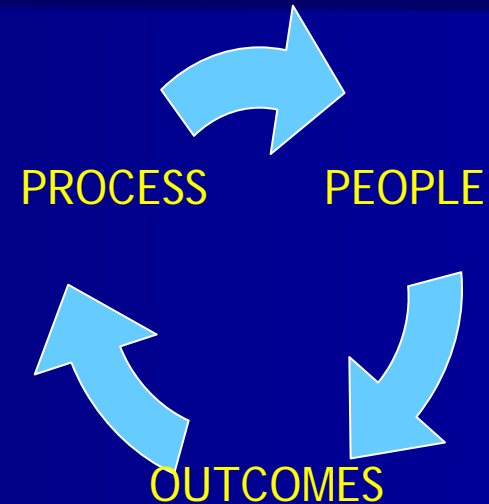
RED DEER COLLEGE

Early Learning and
Child Care Department

Presenter:

Donna Morrison, PhD

Acknowledgement

Special thanks to those
individuals who participated
in this research endeavor.

PROCESS   PEOPLE

OUTCOMES

Who are we?
A snapshot of Red Deer College

Located in the Central Alberta, Red Deer is a ever-expanding City with a population of 85,000.

A growing, dynamic comprehensive College with approximately 5000 Students.

Early Learning and Child Care (ELCC) Department, previously ECD

Employs 4 full time and 5 part time faculty

There are approximately 50 first year, 30 second year, and 100 part time students.

A distance program provides both part time face-to-face and alternate distance delivery.

Recognition of prior learning is used by students to obtain transfer credit and to challenge courses.

(PL) Prior Learning . . .

Learning that has not previously been assessed and recognized, primarily from informal and non-formal sources as well as from formal learning that has not previously been recognized. This learning has occurred in a variety of settings, including, but not limited to, formal educational settings.

Arscott, J. Crowther, Young, M. & Ungarian, L.: <u>Producing Results in Prior Learning</u> (Final report from Gateways Project). Athabasca University, Oct. 2006.

(A) Assessment . . .

The method, process, and procedure for evaluating experimental learning to give value to learning that has not previously been recognized and to identify gaps in experiential and formal learning so that they can be remediated by formal learning.

Arscott, J. Crowther, Young, M. & Ungarian, L.: Producing Results in Prior Learning (Final report from Gateways Project). Athabasca University, Oct. 2006.

(R) Recognition . . .

Equates the assessment of learning to existing formal standards to determine its equivalence.

Arscott, J. Crowther, Young, M. & Ungarian, L.: <u>Producing Results in Prior Learning</u> (Final report from Gateways Project). Athabasca University, Oct. 2006.

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) at RDC

- RPL policy and procedures in place

- Transfer credit for past courses

- Challenges for course work

- Prior learning assessment for individual courses

NOT USED: PROGRAM PLAR

Why is Program PLAR not used?

- *We need more PLAR Champions within our institution.*

- *Course based PLAR has traditionally been the focus, but this is often too time and energy exhaustive for too few benefits. However, Program PLAR is a new concept for us.*

- *Program PLAR is not yet accepted by all faculty and administration in post-secondary institutions.*

- *Not all departments have clear learning outcomes and a process for assessing and recognizing prior learning.*

- *Trained department faculty are required to support and assess Program PLAR and there is no process in place to facilitate training and implementation.*

Opportunity Knocks...

OUR STORY:
Partnerships with Athabasca University

- Effective Practices in the Retention of Learning
- Block Transfer Credit to BPA in Human Services
    - ELCC Certificate – 30 credits
    - ELCC Diploma – 60 credits
    - TA Certificate – 30 credits
    - Rehabilitation Services Diploma – 60 credits
    - Social Work Diploma – 60 credits

Ground Breaking Study

Pan-Canadian Pathways Project

Block credit transfer formalized with jurisdictions through 34 colleges and institutions including 122 programs

Construction Underway

Gateways Project

- Establish program-based (up to certificate or up to diploma level) PLAR within the ECE community and into the third year of the Bachelor of Professional Arts at Athabasca

- Establish the validity and reliability of program-based PLAR

Constructing
Program-Based PLAR

- Collection of materials to identify learning obtained from a variety of sources such as work, workshops, conferences, research, or personal readings

- Self-evaluation to demonstrate understanding of learning

- Analysis of learning to demonstrate understanding of and competency as related to a specific skill set

- Validation of learning from external sources.

Blueprints for Action

Program-Based PLAR incorporates three components in a rigorous process:

- Instruments used, processes and procedures for assessing prior learning have been collaboratively developed and implemented

- Program-specific – designed for a particular disciplinary, professional, or accreditation based

- Outcomes-based – standard against which the candidate is assessed are the exit requirements of a credential, involving the knowledge, skills and attitudes that would be expected to a recent graduate of a program, certification process, or other credentialing process

Gateways Project Outcome

To demonstrate the process of assessment portfolio development through the participation of approximately 120 participants

Potential Benefits:
- Quality
- Accessibility
- Affordability
- Accountability

Gateways Pilot Groups

- **Belleville College Portfolio Development Center:** How to deliver the human services skill set

- **Seneca College:** ongoing post-graduate and professional development opportunities in facilitating advancement and continuing education

- **Yukon College:** worked out nuts and bolts of how to implement PLAR from an institutional perspective and developed process for Portfolio development in the field of early childhood education resulting in:
  - Program Credential
  - Government certification to practice
  - Results for gov't. mandated training upgrading
  - Identification of gaps to be filled

Build on a firm foundation

Learning Statements: ECE Skill Set (9 areas & 18 outcomes)
http://gateways.athabascau.ca/eceskillset.htm

Demonstration of Learning in Area 1: The graduate has reliably demonstrated the ability to plan curriculum that is based on a thorough understanding of child development.

(1 of 18) Identify developmental milestones and variations in children

| 1 2	3 4	5 6	7 8	9 10
Identify developmental milestones and variations of milestones of children	Utilize developmental milestones and variations of milestones to explain behaviour	Utilize developmental milestones and variations of milestones to plan and provide a curriculum for children	Utilize developmental milestones to plan and provide a curriculum that is inclusive	Utilize developmental milestones to support children's learning, and development in the context of family, culture, and society

Signing on to the Project

- Bought into the process –believed in it
- Encouragement from college champions
- Support from Dean
- Registrar: Recruitment Strategy
- Ethics Review (4 months to complete)
- Recruitment of college faculty participants
- Invitation for research participants

The search and research begin . . .

The Research Questions

Does the PLAR process meet the needs of individuals who seek advanced credit for experience and prior learning in the ELCC Department?

Does the College want to make access for students to the PLAR process as a continuing practice? If so, how will it be implemented?
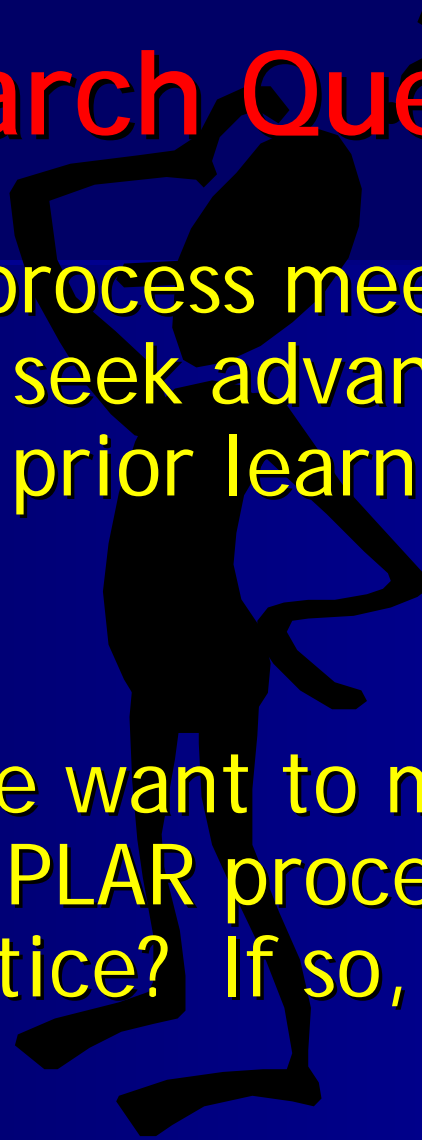
Seeking backing . . .

Benefits for Participants

- Decreased time to diploma completion
- Recognition for informal learning – opportunity to prove yourself
- Eliminate duplication of learning
- Cost recovery: currently, government initiative pays for training and/or PD experiences
- Government recognizes credentials gained through PLAR and provides certification for child care work
- Recognition: Increased credibility in community with parents and in work environments with other professionals
- New Alberta initiation: Accreditation resulting in salary increases for child care employees

Building PLAR Assessment Portfolios

- Contract – Timelines
- Chronological Record
- Life History Paper
- Learning from Life
  - + Elders, mentors, family, colleagues
  - + life experiences: challenges, opportunities
  - + leisure time activities and recreation
  - + self study
  - + raising families
  - + places of employment
  - + the world around us
  - + from healing
- Goals

Documenting learning

- External Validation (more than references)
  A statement of
    - + understanding about the skills that the referee is responding to
    - + the validator's background to support the claim
    - + documentation to support the skills.
- Documented Examples:
  Letters of attestation; Performance Reviews
  Photographs; Video Tapes
  Writing (reports, articles, newsletters, etc.)
  Project Descriptions
  Program Planning documents

PLAR Process . . .

- Seeking participants: (fax promotion, information session)

- Orientation Workshop

- Ongoing Support – Manual and sample materials, Mentoring/Facilitation, Working groups, Buddy systems

- Juried Assessment (3 assessors)

- Awarding of program credential and/or partial credits

- Feedback – letter to participant outlining strengths and areas for improvement (gaps) or course work required to meet credential requirements

- Exit Participant Questionnaires and/or Interviews to complete the Research Project

Seeking participants

December/05: Orientation Session – 15 (13 ELCC & 2 HS)

January/06: Workshop (Crowther): dual purpose of preparing participants while training 3 college faculty to be mentors/facilitators – 6 ELCC participants

After weekend: one dropped out

3 weeks later: two more joined project

All 7 participants applied to RDC ($50.00) and paid PLAR research fee ($300.00)

Now we are getting serious!

Participant Profiles
(names and images are not those of the actual participants)

Participant	June	Ellen	Cari	Dawn	Wanda	Fred	Sami
Age	40-50	40-50	30-40	30-40	30-40	30-40	30-40
Education	Ed Degree	Certificate (ECD)	Certificates (ECD/TA)	Certificate (ECD)	Diploma (Rehab)	Ed Degree	BA Degree
Location	rural	rural	urban	urban	urban	urban	urban
Current Work	Day Home Caregiver	Day Home Agency Owner	Day Home Agency Admin	Day Care Director	Day Care Owner	Day Care Owner	Day Care Owner
Family	Married Preschool Children	Married Grown Children	Married Adolescent Children	Married Preschool Children	Married Preschool Children	Married Preschool Children	Married Preschool Children
Purpose	Financial salary increase & employment opportunities	Recognition from region and ECE community	Financial and self-satisfaction	Financial: salary increase	Recognition from staff, field,& community	Recognition & community promotion	Recognition & community promotion

Participant Profiles
(names and images are not those of the actual participants)

Participant	June	Ellen	Cari	Dawn	Wanda	Fred	Sami
Age	40-50	40-50	30-40				
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Purpose	Financial salary increase & employment opportunities	Recognition from region and ECE community	Financial and self-satisfaction				

Hit a brick wall!!!

Obstacles and Barriers

Why they hit the wall . . .

- Life pressures – unexpected life events
- Work demands
- Organizational problems: Time and Space
- More energy to figure it out than available time
- Not enough to gain and/or not enough to lose to make it a top priority in one's life

Challenges for the FINAL THREE

- Intimidated by information and materials
- Completed contract, but anxious about timelines
- Experienced self-doubt, slow starts, trouble meeting initial deadlines
- Difficult to write learning statements
- Had not saved documents from past experiences that would have been useful
- Hard to find validators to write letters of attestation
- Admitted to tears and frustration
- Feelings of failure when deadlines not met

Depleted resources for two participants . . .

- **Conflicting priorities:**
  - >Underestimation of time and rigor requirement
  - >Busy work life combined with busy family life that didn't provide enough time and energy to concentrate on the tasks

- **Little immediate financial pay off:**
  - > Credential would not result in additional pay – one not eligible and and one got a new job

- **Difficulty understanding the terms and process:**
  - > Skill sets contained academic terms that were not commonly used in their current employment
  - > Process did not flow naturally for them

Door not completely closed

- Second workshop was beneficial in getting them going again – realization that they were on the right track

- Mentors were excellent – available, flexible, helpful, encouraging, supportive, quick to respond

- Realization that they missed a wonderful opportunity. . . . Maybe?

Participant Profiles
(names and images are not those of the actual participants)

Participant	June	Ellen	Cari
Age	40-50	40-50	30-40
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Purpose	Financial salary increase & employment opportunities	Recognition from region and ECE community	Financial and self-satisfaction

The Final Three:

Which one met the deadline?

Portfolio Completed

How and Why??

- Took it one step at a time and persevered
- Confidence grew with each completed task
- Recognized prior learning and self-reflection as valid ways of knowing and being
- Lots of email contact with mentor that worked for her personality traits and learning style

. . . with great feelings of success and satisfaction!

- University background may have provided more experience with self-directed learning
- Personal tenacity, along with desire for the credential and salary increase, were stronger than challenges
- Didn't want to lose the opportunity to get the credential during the research to avoid cost and time of course work
- Discovered that this credential may lead to new employment opportunities

Research Findings:

Lessons Learned

Program PLAR fits with RDC goals and values: Life long learning, service to students, accessibility, accountability, flexible delivery systems, active student recruitment, innovation and creativity….

Build on Gateways findings

The Assessment Portfolio Model is an effective, reliable, and valid method for assessing prior learning experience.

Respect adult learners

Adult learners should have the opportunity to control their own assessment process and demonstrate the required ELCC skills.

Rethink processes and timelines

In terms of the time and energy required of the participants, gaining diploma program credit (69 credits) may be too difficult to demonstrate in a rigorous Portfolio process over a 6 month period of time.

Recruit new ELCC students

ELCC Certificate is a 35 credit program that could be gained through the PLAR process leading to registration in the Diploma online distance program.

Fill the learning gaps

After completing a one year Certificate, Year 2 of ELCC Diploma is a 34 credit program that could be gained through the PLAR process leading to registration in the Diploma online distance program to fill learning gaps.

Determine appropriate PLAR fees

Individuals want value for their money; therefore fees must be appropriate, while also fair and reasonable. Fear of loss of money can be a strong motivator!

Investigate transcript process

Decisions will need to be made about transcripting procedures and whether or not to assign grades to the portfolio for this purpose.

Train facilitators & assessors

Training is essential for PLAR facilitators and assessors. "Shadowing" was an effective strategy for training new mentors/facilitators, as was the group assessment training workshop.

Develop a business plan

Business plan must be developed and costs for ongoing leadership and mentorship must be built into the PLAR process

Support PLAR students

The college will need to develop and maintain workload or contracts for department faculty to provide the required support for participants.

Coordinate efforts

The ELCC department used the ECE skill set from this document as the learning outcomes in the re-design of our practicum and are currently delivering online ELCC diploma level practicum courses (Fall/06).

Discussion Time

- Would a PLAR portfolio development college course with assignments, feedback, and due dates destroy the self-directed and self-reflective process in which the PLAR process is grounded?

- Will increased costs for students result in increased completion rates for the college, increased support to students, and a higher quality and more accountable process? Is this the "right" approach?

Follow the vision. . .

Each of us has our own moral voice, ways of knowing. The recognition of prior learning at its most fundamental is a mutual and reciprocal relationship of respect for the learning of individuals other than ourselves in culturally appropriate ways.

Arscott, J. Crowther, Young, M. & Ungarian, L.: Producing Results in Prior Learning (Final report from Gateways Project). Athabasca University, Oct. 2006.

Reference:

Gateways Web Site

http://gateways.athabascau.ca/about.htm

Information re. Gateways Research
- Human Services Degree PLAR
- ECE Certificate/Diploma PLAR
- For more information: donna.morrison@rdc.ab.ca

Interim Report Available online
Final Report to be completed by end of '06