

# Barriers to Participating in Learning and in the Community

Cheryl Lewis-Fitzgerald

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## Thoughts on Learning

Most people think of *learning* as ‘that thing they did in school’. However, as we start to think about what we have learnt over the period of our lives, we find that a great deal of learning takes place outside of the school system. When I ask people to tell me something they have learnt, most times they will tell me something they learnt in school. However, when I point out to them that they probably all learnt to walk and talk before they even got to school they will start to talk about other learning. Such things come to mind as learning to cook with their Mum, Dad teaching them to drive a car, or someone at work showing them a better way to do something, and so on. The term most people use for this type of learning is *Lifelong Learning*.

## *Lifelong Learning*

Lifelong learning has been defined in a number of different ways. For example, the Australian National Training Authority (ANTA) defines lifelong learning as ‘the process of acquiring knowledge or skills throughout life via education, training, work and general life experiences’. However, the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education explain that ‘lifelong learning’ is a contested term often used in an imprecise way. Sometimes it is used to mean all learning (from cradle to grave, formal and informal) at other times it is used in the UK to mean everything except schooling and/or higher education and/or youth work and/or workplace training’.

In the words of Dr. David McNulty, (2000) Lifelong Learning is the glue that enables thriving and healthy communities. Learning is as everyday an activity as breathing. Significantly the lifelong learning policy in Scotland has defined it as ‘personal fulfilment and enterprise; employability and adaptability; active citizenship and social inclusion’ (Scottish Executive, <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/library5/lifelong/lism-02asp>).

Adult Learning Australia (ALA) has awarded a Visiting Research Fellowship to Peter Kearns, a leading Australian expert on lifelong learning, to prepare a paper on Future Directions for Lifelong Learning in Australia (<http://www.ala.asn.au/docs/2004-11-kearns.html>). In this paper, Kearns (2004) discusses the imperative need for lifelong learning opportunities for all in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

In Chapter 3: What is the Lifelong Learning Approach; Kearns discusses the number of different definitions of lifelong learning, and uses the European Union’s definition:

*“All learning activity undertaken throughout life, with the aim of improving knowledge, skills and competencies within a personal, civic, social and/pr employment related perspective” (European Union, 2001, Making a European Area of Lifelong Learning a Reality, Brussels. p.9.)*

## But What Is LifeLong Learning?

After listing several definitions of lifelong learning above, the question may still remain – but what is it? There has been no universal definition of lifelong learning given and even organisations and associations, such as the Australian Learning Communities Network (ALCN) have not decided on a workable definition for their own use, even though they embrace lifelong learning.

So to add to the list, here is my definition:

***Lifelong Learning = Survival Skills***

That is, lifelong learning is about acquiring skills that enable us to survive (continue to live or exist). This may sound a bit dramatic, but it is about learning to help us through our daily lives. This could be as specific as changing a washer on a tap to learning to change the oil in your car, or knowing how to send and retrieve emails. There are also what have been termed generic or key skills/competencies that everyone should acquire to enable them to survive.

## Working with Non-Traditional Learners

### *Who are Non-Traditional Learner?*

With non-formal learning programs, we are working with learners we have termed as marginalised, but who can also be defined as non-traditional learners. For many of our learners (not all, but the majority), school and learning have been negative experiences (i.e. youth at risk). Or, circumstances may make it difficult for some of our learners to participate in learning (i.e. financial, women in domestic violence, refugees, people with a disability, recovering addicts).

Many of our learners would not be comfortable with stepping into a school, TAFE, university or Neighbourhood House (at least not when they begin with us), let alone be faced with a strict inflexible curriculum that does not allow them to achieve their personal goals. It is important that the programs take place in organisations such as the Salvation Army and The Smith Family, as these are the places where our learners feel comfortable. This is because they are in a place where they feel comfortable and have the support they need around them.

The range of our non-traditional learners include:

- Older isolated adults (particularly those living in public housing)
- Youth at Risk
- Young people who have left school before completing Year 10
- People from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds
- People with a disability (intellectual and/or psychiatric or HIV positive)
- Disadvantaged women (i.e. escaping domestic violence)
- Unemployed (long and short term)
- Aged
- Recovering addicts
- Homeless

However, it is very difficult to give a clear definition of our learners, because not only are they non-traditional, they are also individuals, each with their own personal history, problems and goals. The only definition I can really give is to say, "No two are alike". So while it can be difficult to pigeonhole our learners, they do share a commonality of some form of marginalisation, and are usually not comfortable in traditional school and education settings.

Like the term 'lifelong learning' it is difficult to define 'non-traditional' learners. Sometimes they are referred to as non-learners or disengaged learners. However, there are some characteristics of non-traditional learners we can use.

## Characteristics of Non-Traditional Learners

Non-traditional learners are more likely to be:

- Older
- Retired
- Unemployed
- Disabled
- Male
- Living in deprived areas

They are also more likely to have:

- Low levels of qualifications
- Left education at an earlier age
- Lower incomes
- Not participated in learning for a long time

A person's readiness to participate in an organised learning program is influenced by a whole range of factors such as age, race, family background, school experience, social class, cultural norms, occupation, external influences and pressures (eg from employer, welfare benefit regulations, family), one's place of residence and the existence or lack of local learning opportunities, and, crucially, by policy decisions and thrusts that affect the nature and extent of learning and economic opportunities available to adults (NIACE, 1999).

Non-traditional learners are not a homogenous group and include:

- Individuals who simply do not feel motivated to engage in learning through lack of confidence, disaffection or feeling that 'it is not for them', and
- Individuals, who would like to be involved in learning, but are unable to because of external barriers.

These two sets of non-traditional learners experience barriers to participation that are different, but interrelated. For example, lack of motivation may be linked to lack of opportunity or a perceived lack of benefit in the learning (Upton, 2002).

## Barriers to Participation

Hillage and Aston (2001) split the barriers to participation of non-traditional learners into three groups:

1. **Attitudinal barriers:** negative attitudes to learning, lack of confidence or lack of motivation

2. **Physical and material barriers:** costs of learning (direct – fees, and indirect – transport, books, equipment, childcare), lack of time, lack of information, geographical
3. **Structural barriers:** lack of appropriate education or training opportunities, constraints of the benefit system

## Attitudinal Barriers

The attitudinal barriers fall into two main categories

1. Lack of Confidence: such as being nervous about going back into the classroom, trepidation of not being able to keep up with the course, fear of failure
2. Lack of Motivation: such as not seeing benefits of the learning, prefer to be doing other activities, or feel they have done enough 'learning' when they went to school

If school has been a negative experience for someone, they will lack confidence and motivation when going into a new learning experience. They may also have other attitudinal barriers such as:

- *'I'm too old for this -learning is for young people, not me'*
- *'I'm okay doing what I am already doing'*
- *'I'm not smart enough to learn about computers'*
- *'I didn't like school'*
- *'My mates would laugh at me'*
- *'What if I can't keep up with the rest of the class?'*

*"Fear is often masked as laziness, lack of motivation, blaming, etc." - Debra L. Angel  
No One is Unemployable Creative Solutions for Overcoming Barriers to Employment  
(1997).*

## Physical and Material Barriers

1. **Financial Constraints:** Not be able to afford the cost of the learning, and support materials such as books and equipment. Also other financial constraints could include the cost of transport and child care
2. **Time Constraints:** Lack of time to attend the learning, or the learning occurring at a time that is not suitable for the learner (for example, they may be a shift worker, and training takes place during other shifts).
3. **Lack of Information:** Not knowing what learning opportunities exist for them
4. **Geographical Isolation:** Public transport is not always reliable, and petrol prices continue to rise – can impact on a person being able to attend learning. Also, feeling isolated from the community – such as a different culture, religion or language can make a person feel isolated, and therefore not want to participate in learning.
5. **Lack of Basic Skills:** Difficulties with reading and writing, ESL, lack of previous experience

## Structural Barriers

1. **Lack of Local Learning Opportunities:** No programs offered locally for what the learner wants to do, or have the necessary support for the learner to attend (eg program available, but place does not cater for people in a wheelchair)
2. **Benefits Disincentives:** Fear of losing welfare benefits in doing too much training.

Trainers/Facilitators need to be more than just aware that differences exist amongst their learners. The trainer/facilitator must recognise these differences and adopt appropriate strategies to maximise learning, taking into account that:

- Not every individual has the same set of purposes nor the same motivation for learning in a particular situation
- Not every individual, at any one time, is at the same stage of understanding or skill, and at the same stage of readiness for the next step
- As individuals vary in the way they perceive things and hence the way they learn, no single style of training or method will be equally effective for all members of the group
- Individuals vary in the amount of assistance required and when that assistance is required
- Individuals require varying amounts of practice to master new learning
- Individuals vary in their degree of understanding

Identifying various barriers to learning will have implications for your choice of training methods. In a group-training situation there is a limit to actions you can take but, once characteristics of learners are identified, you can choose a number of training methods that help cater for individual needs.

Some common barriers to learning are listed below. This list is not exhaustive and you may be able to identify others.

<b><i>POSSIBLE BARRIER</i></b>	<b><i>SUGGESTED SOLUTION</i></b>
<p><b>Language, literacy</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Language difficulties</li> <li>▪ Non-English speaking background</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Additional English classes</li> <li>▪ Simple texts</li> <li>▪ Emphasis on pictorial learning materials</li> <li>▪ Paired buddy system</li> <li>▪ Good English speaker with poor English speaker</li> </ul>
<p><b>Cultural background</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Socio-economic</li> <li>▪ Religious beliefs</li> <li>▪ Cultural differences</li> <li>▪ Level of support</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Paired buddy system</li> <li>▪ Additional training time</li> <li>▪ Personal research into cultural norms and practices</li> <li>▪ Offer assistance outside of class-time</li> </ul>
<p><b>Physical impairment</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Poor sight</li> <li>▪ Poor hearing</li> <li>▪ Impaired dexterity</li> <li>▪ Strength level</li> <li>▪ Age</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Prepared seating arrangements</li> <li>▪ Additional time to practise</li> <li>▪ Use pictorial aids</li> <li>▪ Additional breaks</li> <li>▪ Software on computer can be adjusted for individuals</li> <li>▪ Sitting at the front of the class</li> <li>▪ Group work – share the tasks</li> </ul>

<b><i>POSSIBLE BARRIER</i></b>	<b><i>SUGGESTED SOLUTION</i></b>
<b>Previous experience/learning</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Level of education</li> <li>▪ Type of education</li> <li>▪ Degree of previous experience</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Check previous experience – can it be utilised?</li> <li>▪ Support transfer of skills to new situation</li> </ul>
<b>Learning styles</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Preferred theory to practice or vice-versa</li> <li>▪ Likes constant revision/practice</li> <li>▪ Prefers self-pacing material to presentations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Incorporate various training methods so that most can use preferred learning style</li> <li>▪ Encourage self-management of learning but provide appropriate advice when needed</li> <li>▪ Ask for feedback and act on it</li> </ul>
<b>Motivation</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Not highly motivated</li> <li>▪ Not interested</li> <li>▪ History of failure</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Counselling where necessary</li> <li>▪ Identify and talk through motivational/attitudinal issues</li> <li>▪ Provide encouragement</li> <li>▪ Relate training to work performance or other need</li> <li>▪ Break the learning/assessment into smaller chunks</li> </ul>
<b>Personality traits</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Poor self-image</li> <li>▪ Loner</li> <li>▪ Insecure about abilities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ May be related to poor motivation – counsel where necessary</li> <li>▪ Use buddy system</li> <li>▪ Discuss preferred ways of learning</li> <li>▪ Encourage group participation</li> </ul>

## ***Working with Non-Traditional Learners***

*“The facilitator of Adult Learning must accept two major responsibilities regarding the learner. First, they must create an environment where learning may be maximised and secondly, they must assist in removing barriers to learning.”*

*Dr Buddy Lyle, Department of Vocational and Adult Education University of Arkansas  
Department of Health in Wellness in the Community, Volume 13, Spring 2002*

## **Learning and Non-Traditional Learners**

### **Learning Principles**

In the development of these non-formal learning programs, I used my experience as a qualified trainer and assessor, and also my experiences in teaching ICT to TAFE teachers in non-traditional settings.

Below are the principles that I used in establishing these programs in the non-formal learning environment.

In analysing the non-formal learning milieu, it became clear that the focus of the sessions is based around the approach of the individual trainer/trainer/facilitator and their ability to use learning principles and techniques within learner-centred learning. We can break down the process of learning into the acquisition of:



**Skills**



**Knowledge,  
and**



**Attitude**

However, there are a number of elements that can determine if the learning will take place for the individual. For example:

- Content
- Environment
- Teacher/Trainer/Facilitator
- Process
- Emotions of the Learner

## Adult Learning Principles

The work of Malcolm Knowles (1970) in andragogy (adult learning) is crucial understanding and practice for the trainer/facilitator.

Adults and children are different in the way that they learn. Imagine being a pupil in a Primary School at your current stage in life! Malcolm Knowles, lecturer and author in the field of adult education termed the word Andragogy to describe Adult Learning. The basic foundation for Andragogy is that adults learn differently from children. He described four major principles of andragogy:

## Andragogy

1. Adults resent being treated like children
2. Adults have previous experience
3. Adults must be ready to learn
4. Adult learners are problem-centred

From the work of Malcolm Knowles, seven main beliefs of adult learning have been identified:



### Meaningful information

Adults want a reason for undertaking the learning. The learning must be relevant to their lives.



## Active learning

Adults need to be actively involved in their own learning with opportunities for practice, asking questions and trying out what they have learnt.



## Multi-sense learning

All adults have different styles of learning - visual, auditory and kinaesthetic.



## Repeated practice

To gain full competence, adults need opportunities to practice what they have been taught.



## Feedback

Feedback is vital for the learner and the trainer to determine the effectiveness of the learning.



## Reward

Adults require rewards to motivate them to learn.



## Primacy and Recency

Adults take greater notice of the first (Primacy) and last (Recency) pieces of the instruction.

## Learning styles

It is important that the trainer/facilitators recognize that different people learn in different ways. It is important that in their training session they include the following learning styles:



**VISUAL**

Visual learners may ignore or seem like they do not listen to spoken directions and much prefer to look at maps, graphs, charts and other visual information. They can form a picture of things such as a word written down when trying to spell that word, and seeing the map or street directory when trying to navigate and drive at the same time.



**AUDITORY**

Auditory learners like to both talk and listen. These learners may need to repeat sections of what is said to them, even silently, to mentally 'hear' information as they commit it to memory. They like to participate in discussion of ideas and prefer to work with music in the background. When trying to spell they will sound out their attempts.



**KINAESTHETIC**

Kinaesthetic learners prefer to learn via direct contact or hands-on. These learners will want to take things apart, feel surfaces and touch objects. While this is a preferred style for children to learn, about 5 per cent of the population holds onto this style through adulthood. With respect to learning through ICT, these learners prefer to get onto the computer and have a go.

The implications are that any group of adult learners will have different learning styles, and allowing for these styles and providing a variety of learning strategies for the group to meet their needs is what we should aim for. For small groups and one-on-one learning, a discussion of learning styles will assist the trainer/facilitator to make the learning more meaningful for each individual learner.

## Active Learning

Over 2400 years ago, Confucius declared:

*What I hear, I forget*  
*What I see, I remember*  
*What I do, I understand.*



From this you can see the importance of active learning – people learn best when they actually get to do practical hands on sessions. Siberman (1996) in his book Active Learning: 101 strategies to teach any subject modified the Confucius saying from above, and made it into, what he called, The Active Learning Credo, which develops the idea of how people learn further.

*What I hear, I forget*  
*What I hear and see, I remember a little*  
*What I hear, see, and ask questions about or discuss with someone else, I begin to understand*  
*What I hear see, discuss and do, I acquire knowledge and skills*  
*What I teach to another, I master.*

From this you can see why it is important to use all the learning styles in learning – Visual, Auditory and Kinaesthetic

Psychological learning is usually conceived of as involving change (Walker, 1995). The change usually involves some transformation in an individual's behaviour (Travers, 1997). The change results in knowledge, skill acquisition and attitude formation (Mazur, 1998). Some of these changes or responses are associated with the content of learning, others with the process and yet others with the trainer or the environment in which learning takes place. These things – skills, knowledge,

attitudes and a host of subtle emotional effects (e.g. confusion, contentment, enthusiasm, satisfaction and happiness) are the content of learning.

## Learning is enhanced by:

Opportunity for  
learners to  
collaborate

Frequent dialogue  
between trainer  
and participants

Prompt feedback  
on participant's  
performance

Opportunities for  
participants to  
apply theory

A chance for  
participants to  
exercise initiative

Personal and  
individual training

Trustful relations - trainer has expertise in area  
and shows respect for participants

### Other Factors To Consider

#### The Need to Know

Adults need to know why they must learn something before undertaking to learn it. When adults undertake to learn something they will invest considerable energy in probing into the benefits they will get from learning it and the disadvantages if they do not learn it. You should:

- Allow time to discuss the outcomes of the learning with the learners.
- Explain how the learning will be useful in real-life situations
- Help learners discover through real or simulated experiences the gap between where they are now and where they want to be

- Help learners become aware of their needs by using personal appraisal systems, exposure to role models, job rotation, etc.

## The Learner's Self-Concept

Adults have a self-concept of being responsible for making their own decisions. They often resent others imposing their wills. This can pose a problem in adult training situations particularly where the environment resembles previous school experiences: being told what to do and how to do it. Possible strategies for you as a trainer include:

- Developing a learning environment that supports this self concept where learners feel at ease and respected
- Involving learners in the process of identifying their own learning needs
- Involving learners in the process of planning much of their learning in consultation with the trainers
- Encouraging the learning-teaching process to become the mutual responsibility of both learners and trainers. The trainer becomes more of a facilitator/resource person and co-enquirer
- Helping the learners manage their own learning and self-evaluation
- Giving responsibilities to learners for managing the group.

## Personal Experience

Adults develop patterned ways of perceiving and understanding through their past experiences so they have a well-organised set of personal meanings, values, attitudes, knowledge and skills which simultaneously define, create, and in some cases, make them less open-minded. Adults can contribute to the learning of others because their experience renders them as rich resources for learning. Implications for training include:

- Relating new situations, materials and methods to past experiences
- Acknowledging the past experience as an active component in learning and respecting it as a potential resource for learning
- Employing training methods that use the learner's experience – group discussions, case studies, role-plays and so on.

## Readiness to Learn

Individuals learn best those things they perceive as enabling them to move forward to the next phase of development. Adults have many roles: for example, parent, partner, friend and colleague. As adults move through life these roles change and develop. Development occurs when adults become ready to learn new skills and knowledge in order to help them move forward. Implications for training include:

- Ensuring that the content of the program meets the perceived need of the learner and is relevant
- Sequencing the content so that it keeps in tune with the learner's development tasks
- Checking back with learners on progress, understanding, issues, and satisfaction with training.

## Orientation to Learning

Adult learning focuses on the problems of the immediate present. There are usually pressures on the adult to resolve conflicts and solve problems, a need to learn quickly and get on with living. Adults are often reluctant to engage in learning activities that do not appear to have immediate and

pragmatic applications to real life. Education is a process of improving the adult's ability to cope with daily problems. Educational activity is problem-centred or performance-centred. Implications for learning include:

- Focusing on the concerns of individual learners and developing learning experiences that help meet these concerns
- Starting the learning experience using the problems and concerns adults currently have

## Motivation

While adults are responsive to many external motivators (better pay, promotion, bigger house, etc.) the most powerful motivation is internal pressure (desire for better job satisfaction, higher self-esteem, quality of life style, etc.). Implications for training include:

- Ensuring that the programs aid self-esteem and promote better job satisfaction
- Ensuring that there are sufficient resources and opportunities to use those resources in training.

## Non-Formal Learning

### *What makes it work?*

From research I have found that the significant characteristics of the non-formal learning milieu with non-traditional learners are:

1. The Use of Dialogue and Feedback Between the Trainer/Facilitator and Learners
2. The Ability of the Trainer/Facilitator to Motivate, Reward and Empower the Learner
3. The Facility for Learner to Practise New Skills and Consolidate Others
4. The Edifier Building a Safe and Trusting Environment for the Learner
5. The Learner Being Able to Identify and Achieve Their Personal Goals
6. A Holistic and Flexible Approach to the Training

The most important characteristic in the non-formal learning milieu is dialogue, that is centred on the learner's 'lifeworld' (Welton, 1995). It is through the rapport that the edifier builds with the learners that they are allowed to feel they are in a safe and trusting environment. It also allows for previous experiences to be developed and provides clear expectations for the learners. Feedback and reward allow the learner to monitor their progress, which in turn leads to motivation and empowerment. This can only take place if the edifier talks **with** the learners, and not **at** them. The dialogue is around what is important to the learner (e.g. football or family history). That is, the edifier needs to stay with the learner's experience – the learner's life world.

Also, as the learner grows in confidence, they begin to collaborate with other learners to ask for, give and receive help. This gives them a sense of belonging and continues to build the safe and trusting environment. It is through the dialogue that the learning takes place, which ensures that the learning is personal and individual to the learner, that it is active, problem-based (or needs-centred) and multi-sensory.

Confidence also increases when learners are given the opportunity to practise what they are learning and are given praise. This builds and consolidates their skill levels, which in turn increases their motivation and empowers them to do more. It is through the practice and the support of the edifier and fellow learners that a learner's personal goals are achieved – this further confirms, motivates and encourages the setting of new goals.

It is difficult to separate each of these characteristics, as in reality they are interdependent and together form a holistic view of the non-formal milieu. However, the key to the success of this learning environment is dialogue, together with flexibility of the programs, so that the focus is on the individual, to allow them to set and achieve their own goals, in an environment where they feel comfortable and safe. The rapport that the edifier builds with the learners is paramount to the achievement of programs such as whereveruni.

The focus of non-formal learning programs are to allow the individual learner the opportunity to work towards achieving their own goal/s. While Paulo Freire (1970) work and beliefs are in revolution, the non-formal learning environment is a revelation. It approaches learning from a different angle than that of traditional and formal education, yet it is still firmly based in learning principles. It is community capacity building in action, and contributes to our social capital. Perhaps it is a revolution, at least to our learners, but I prefer to think of it as a gentle transformation (Lewis-Fitzgerald, 2002).

### ***Fields of Fascination – What it is and how it works***

*“...The Smith Family looks at individuals “fields of fascination” to promote computer knowledge...Giving the disadvantaged access to computers and IT training is not enough to overcome Australia’s digital divide” “People will learn about their own interests...promoting IT literacy sees technology as a means of social inclusion and reintroduction to learning” “Instead of telling people they need to learn about technology so they can increase their skills, we invite them to use technology to learn more about V8 supercars or cooking or gardening – whatever they might be actually interested in”*

*Dr Kristy Muir, The Smith Family*

#### **Fascination (n.)**

1. The capability of eliciting intense interest or of being very attractive.
2. The state of being intensely interested or attracted: *listened in fascination*.
3. An intensely interesting, attractive quality or trait.

**Synonyms:** allure, appeal, attraction, bug, captivation, engrossment, enthrallment, grabber, hang-up, involvement, lure, obsession, preoccupation, pull, raptness, thing for

#### **Field (n.)**

1. An area of human activity or interest
2. A topic, subject, or area of academic interest or specialization.
3. Profession, employment, or business.
4. An area or setting of practical activity or application outside an office, school, factory, or laboratory

**Synonyms:** area, avocation, bag, calling, department, discipline, domain, environment, job, line, occupation, racket, range, reach, scope, speciality, specialty, sweep, thing, vocation, walk, weakness

[http://thesaurus.reference.com/search?q=field and](http://thesaurus.reference.com/search?q=field+and)  
<http://dictionary.reference.com/search?q=field>

Richard Bolles first used the term 'Fields of Fascination'; author of the best selling job search guide What Colour is Your Parachute? Debra L. Angel has also used the term in her book No One is Unemployable Creative Solutions for Overcoming Barriers to Employment (1997).

What we aim to do is find out what our learners are interested in, that is their passion, favourite topic or need is. With the range of learners we have, this varies enormously. Some examples we have had include:

- Family History
  - Cricket statistics
  - Getting a job
  - Old army tanks
  - Photography
  - Designing their own web page
  - Verses of the bible
  - Rainfall in a certain area
  - V8 Supercars
  - Sewing patterns
  - Favourite pop stars
  - Recycling
  - Travel
- to name but a few*

From this field of fascination or interest, we build the learning. Usually it will start with an Internet search for information, images, contact, etc. Then, depending on the topic, we could branch out into creating word documents, databases, PowerPoint presentations, and so on. Around this we will also include:

- Communication Skills
- Problem Solving Skills
- Plan and Organise Activities
- Collect, Analyse and Organise Information

Depending on the learner and their interest, we may need to bring in other learning such as:

- Literacy and numeracy skills
- Work with Others and in Teams
- Cultural Understanding
- Taking responsibility
- Being innovative
- Being creative

This is expanded further in the following section 'Projects'.

Most people have an interest or need of some sort, but occasionally the more unmotivated learner may not be able to identify a field of fascination immediately. Sometimes it can take a few weeks for this to be identified. I even had one learner that took three months to come up with his field of fascination. We were still able to do some basic computer skills learning during that time, but once he did come up with his passion and identified what he wanted to do, the learning really took off, and he did exceptionally well.

Bolles (2002) in his book What Color is Your Parachute? gets people to find out their field of fascination by asking the following questions:

*“If I could talk about something to someone all day long, day after day, what would that subject or field of interest be?”*

OR

*“If I was stuck on a desert island with a person who only had the capacity to speak on a few subjects, what would I pray those subject were?”*

Of course, it is possible that learners would have more than one field of fascination. Bolles (2002) recommends that you ask:

*“If you were in a conversation with someone covering two of your favourite subjects at once, towards which of these two interests would you try to steer the conversation?”*

If it is more than two interests, then repeat the process with another two interests and keep shifting them down to you find the most favourite.

It does take skills for the trainer/facilitator to find out what the interests of a learner are. What is required is the emphasis on the dialogue and rapport that it built between the trainer/facilitator and the learner that will allow for this to happen. (See Chapter 2 - Dialogue/Feedback) The chat over a cup of coffee can do wonders in finding this out. A simple:

- *“What do you like to do?”*
- *“What would you like to do?”*
- *“What is your favourite thing in the whole world?”*
- *“What would you like to find out about?”*
- *“Do you have a favourite topic/interest/film start/singer/TV show?”*

can get the ball rolling for you.

## ***Holistic Learning***

From this, you can start to see how holistic learning is important and how it ties into the survival/lifelong learning skills of the 486. The use of projects in non-formal learning allows for learners to set their own goals around their passion, need or Field of Fascination.

## ***Learning to Learn***

Learning to learn has been defined as possessing, or acquiring, the knowledge and skills to learn effectively in whatever learning situation an individual encounters (Smith, 1983). This is also known as cross-contextual learning and is central to lifelong learning. Candy (1990) identified the features of learning to learn as:

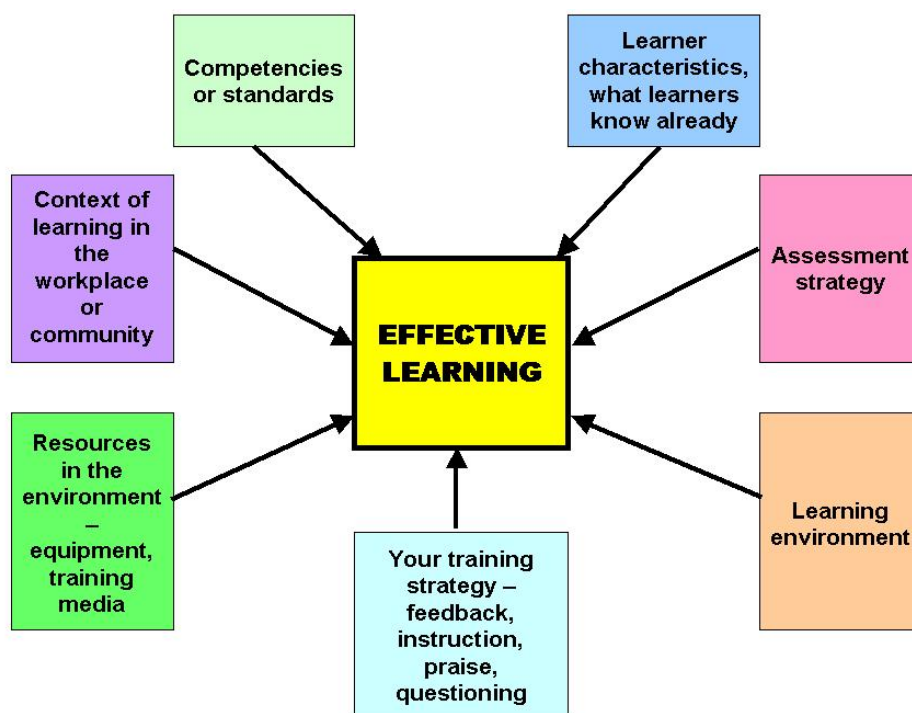
- A lifelong process
- Developmental
- Acquisition of a variety of attitudes, understanding and skills
- Occurs prior to and concurrent with learning
- Enter into the deep meaning structures of the material to be learned
- Having both generic and content-specific elements
- A multi-dimensional entity – that is the different interpretations people give to learning

Learners are learning to learn in non-formal programs, although at first they may not realise that they are learning. For some learners, they are discovering that they can learn (especially those who have had a negative experience of schooling) and for others they develop the belief that they can learn again. That is, learning doesn't stop when you leave school, but it's lifelong and life-wide experience.

The use of the fields of fascination approach allows the learner to learn at their own pace, and on topics or goals that they want to learn about. The non-formal environment allows them to develop those skills, while also developing their lifelong learning and learning to learn skills. By focusing on their field of fascination, the learners are extending their capacities for learning.

## Effective Learning

The factors to be taken into consideration when designing and writing a Learning Circle training plan and delivering this plan are as follows:



For non-formal learning to be effective, it must have:

- **Active Participation:** Discussion amongst learners and trainer/facilitation
- **Face-To-Face Contact:** Provide non-verbal as well as verbal communication
- **Purposeful Activity:** Each session, for each individual must have a purpose and develop an orderly manner
- **Preparation:** Learners must have information or experience in order to have a meaningful dialogue and learning
- **An Effective Facilitator:** To keep the learning focused and to oversee problems
- **Structure:** Sets purpose for each learner. It is not meant to encourage inflexibility but to clarify purpose and tasks.

The advantages of small group learning are essentially that the learners are active and should be able to put forward ideas in a non-threatening situation. Points not fully understood can be quickly identified and reinforced.

*This information in this paper is taken from my work on the ALA-ANTA Innovation Research Grant 2005. This research and a practical manual on non-formal learning will be available later in the year.*

*Please feel free to contact me to discuss this work further.*

*Cheryl Lewis-Fitzgerald  
RMIT Learning Networks  
GPO Box 2476V  
Melbourne, Vic. 3001  
Tel. 03 9925 9631  
Fax. 03 9925 2561  
Mob. 0411 437 414  
Email. [cheryl.lewis-fitzgerald@rmit.edu.au](mailto:cheryl.lewis-fitzgerald@rmit.edu.au)*