



Different styles of learning

In this issue of the ELMO newsletter, we bring you information about how to support learners' different needs and different ways of learning. We tell you about an exciting new professional development strategy for adult literacy educators who work with learners with learning disabilities. We also bring you the best practices of three experienced literacy practitioners in BC.

The Whole Life Approach to Learning Disabilities in Adult Literacy

Suzanne Smythe, PhD, Lecturer/Literacy and Adult Education, Faculty of Education, Simon Fraser University



Suzanne Smythe

The impact of learning disabilities on teaching and learning in adult literacy settings is of great concern to adult literacy educators, and is receiving greater attention in research literature. Indeed, the Learning Disability Association of Canada (LDAC) estimates that between 15-20% of Canadians are affected by learning disabilities; in adult literacy programs,

between 30-70% of adults may have a learning disability (Movement for Canadian Literacy, 2006). According to LDAC, a learning disability affects the acquisition, organization, retention, understanding or use of verbal or non-verbal information; learning disabilities are lifelong, and are "suggested by unexpected academic under-achievement or achievement which is maintained only by unusually high levels of effort and support" (LDAC, 2007, p.1).

Historically, the field of adult education has tended to under-emphasize the presence and consequences of learning disabilities for adult learning, attributing learning difficulties to "literacy issues" more generally.

Certainly, the project of diagnosing learning disabilities in adulthood is fraught with complexities. While well-designed assessments and screens can offer valuable insights into a specific learning difficulty, the challenge is to develop strategies that work for each individual, in the cultural, social and economic context in which they live and learn. There is, in effect, no magic recipe, and much depends on social relationships, advocacy, resources, knowledge and values. Indeed, learning difficulties are a "whole life" issue.

This is the guiding premise of a new professional development initiative called "The Whole Life Approach to Learning Disabilities in Adult Literacy Settings". Funded by the Office of Literacy and Essential Skills (OLES), in a partnership between Literacy BC and the BC Association for People with Disabilities, the goal of the "whole life" project is to support adult literacy educators and learners to work with and through learning disabilities in their learning settings. We want to harness the collective experience and knowledge of the adult literacy field in BC, bring forward new research and ideas, offer opportunities for training and discussion, and develop tools and strategies that are appropriate in diverse social, cultural and economic settings. Please visit us at our new project website, check out our extensive list of resources, participate in our online training and discussions, and follow our blog for current news and topics on learning disabilities in adult literacy settings!

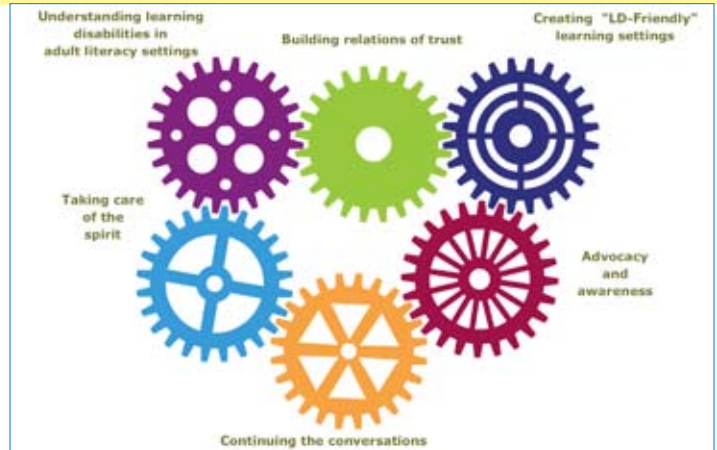
Learning Disabilities, Continued from Page 1

LDAC (2007). "LD Defined". Accessed September 2008 from: <http://www.ldac-taac.ca/Defined/defined-e.asp>.

Website: www.literacybc.ca/LDProject/home.htm
 Blog: www.literacybc.ca/LDProject/pages/blog.htm

For more information about the "Whole Life" project, please contact:

Emily Hunter & Kate Trethewey at Literacy BC
 E-mail Emily at: ehunter@literacy.bc.ca,
 E-mail Kate at: ktrethewey@literacy.bc.ca



Vist [/www.literacybc.ca/LDProject/home.htm](http://www.literacybc.ca/LDProject/home.htm) to learn more.

Guest Reviewer: Jan Weiten, Department Head, Basic Education Department, Vancouver Community College



Jan Weiten

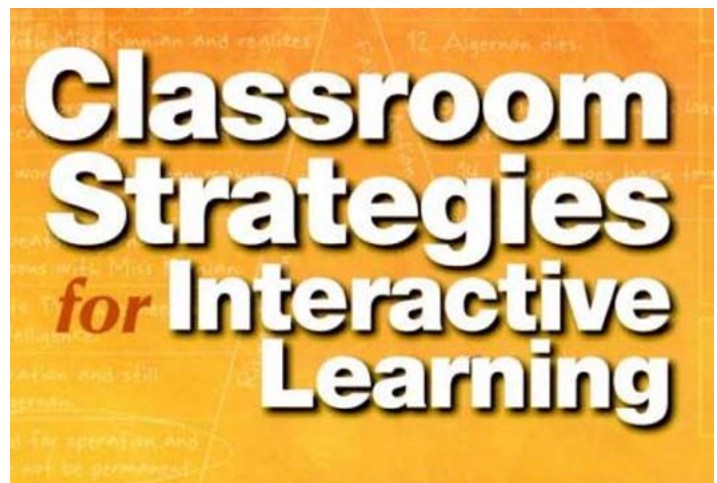
When I think about materials that relate to accommodating different ways of learning and working with learners with diverse needs, one excellent resource for teachers that comes to mind is Classroom Strategies for Interactive Learning (Doug Buehl, International Reading Association, 2001) Though the text is not specifically intended

for teachers of adult literacy learners, it outlines numerous versatile and diverse approaches aimed at developing strategic readers and learners – many of which are suitable for or could be quite easily adapted to use with learners of any age, most literacy levels, and in many different learning contexts.

One example from this excellent resource is SMART (Self-Monitoring Approach to Reading & Thinking). This method encourages the learner to carry on an internal monologue while reading in order to overtly interact with the print on the page – and to actively think about thinking. The underlying premise of this approach is that, in order to be successful learners, readers must begin to recognize what they understand and don't understand about what they are reading. It encourages learners to be explicit about what they don't understand by pinpointing the trouble: Is it unknown vocabulary? A word that

is difficult to decode? Is it a difficult sentence? Or could it be that the subject itself is something which is unfamiliar? Once the learner can identify the specific difficulty, it becomes easier to target a strategy to support learning. Two main advantages of this approach is that it supports learners in becoming independent readers and thinkers and also teaches and encourages persistence in learning – goals which are dear to the heart of any literacy teacher.

Throughout this resource there is the underlying recognition that learning is created by the learner through an active and constructive process, not something that can possibly be replicated or reproduced without interaction. Indeed, it explicitly points out that no two learners experience learning in the same way and is aimed at providing a diversity of strategies to accommodate a diversity of learning styles and needs.



Best Practice....Three Practitioners share their stories



Emily Hunter

Best practice... practitioners share how they work with learners with different learning styles.

In September 2009, Emily Hunter (ELMO Project Manager) asked three practitioners in British Columbia to share their experiences of working with learners with different learning needs. Below is a summary of those conversations.

Diana Twiss, Senior Director of Literacy Development, Literacy BC



Diana Twiss

1. Please tell me a little about yourself and your work with learners with diverse needs.

I have been working in adult literacy in BC since 1995 - and prior to that I worked on a first nations reserve in Northwestern Ontario developing curriculum. I spent two years working with adults at the Invergarry Learning Centre in Surrey, and from 1997 to 2007 at Capilano College

in the Community Development and Outreach Department. While there I worked in a variety of community and workplace settings with the same goal; to support people in their literacy development and to work with employers and organizations to provide learning opportunities to workers and participants.

2. Please tell me about the Youth Literacy project and the learners it was targeting. Why was it effective?

The Youth Literacy project was a national demonstration project which asked the question, what would it take to bring disengaged and at-risk youth back to learning? They were looking specifically at the group of teens who were not able to keep up with school because of their struggles with reading. As a result many had "tuned out, acted out and dropped out." The project was effective because they had the luxury of three year funding, tons of expertise, and a great deal of support from all partners including

the parents of the students they were working with. For a quick summary report on the project, please visit http://www.youthliteracy.ca/reports/reports_ns/summary_report.pdf

3. Can you recommend resources?

There are many books on engaging at-risk youth, but the main place to go for information is: www.youthliteracy.ca.

This is the website that was created as a result of the project. On this website you can find answers to most questions you may have about the demonstration project and research component. You will also find a section which contains an amazing collection of teacher resources. It is truly a gold mine. And it is not just materials that will engage youth. We've used these materials in correction facilities and have received positive feedback from the teachers.



Visit www.youthliteracy.ca to find a collection of teacher resources, and information on the Youth Literacy Project.

Coming Soon: Dr. Jenny Horsman on Violence and Learning

The January ELMO News will feature in-depth interview with Dr. Horsman about the effect of violence on learning.

Best Practice....Three Practitioners share their stories

Michelle Lebeau

Michelle Lebeau, Instructor, Capilano University, Regional Literacy Coordinator and Program Manager/Instructor, Squamish Faces Family Learning Program**1. Please tell me a little about yourself and your work.**

I have been working in the literacy field for almost 20 years and have experience both in inner city and rural settings. For the past 12 years, I've been privileged to be doing literacy work through Capilano University (formerly College). This work has included a range of work, including Regional Literacy Coordination (12 years), teaching in community based programs, and teaching base funded programs.

2. Please explain what Structure of Intellect is and how you use it in your work with learners with diverse needs. Why do you find it effective?

The Structure of Intellect program is a brain-based learning program that helps develop the pre-requisite skills learners need to be successful in a learning environment. Often, educators make the assumption that these requisite skills are in place when they begin to teach. If the skills are undeveloped or under-developed, learning will either not happen or will be very slow.

If a student doesn't have a pre-requisite learning ability, such as memory, for example, learning can be frustratingly slow. The Structure of Intellect program allows us to assess for undeveloped or under-developed learning skills. Once these are identified, we can develop, using specially designed materials, a program to develop these weak areas. We are assessing and developing the neural networks of the brain so that learning can be facilitated. The program also allows us to assess for sensory perception issues that may be affecting a person's ability to learn. These include vision, auditory and sensory-integration issues.

At Capilano University, we've designed a program (VISION) based on the use of the SOI program. Learners with learning disabilities (diagnosed or undiagnosed) and others with learning frustrations are referred to the program by subject area instructors (e.g., ABE), counsellors and others. These learners can be assessed and can then access four hours a week (currently) of programming in a classroom setting. In this classroom, we provide both cognitive abilities development (using SOI materials) and sensory-integration and perceptual skills development exercises. Many of the students in this program also participate in ABE classes, volunteer tutor programs or in other curriculum based programs. As such, it works alongside but is also independent of these programs. We are lucky to have this opportunity. We find this program and this model to be very effective in helping larger numbers of learners with learning problems than we could accommodate with the other limited resources available. We are able to identify, assess and support many more learners than we could in the past using this approach. We have also been very happy with the outcomes we've seen. Many of our learners have experienced significant or profound improvements in their ability to succeed in curriculum based classes or programs after undertaking the VISION program.

3. Can you recommend resources (i.e. books, websites etc) that support your work and/or are useful for teaching learners with diverse needs?

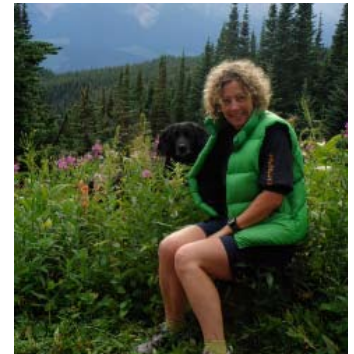
The Structure of Intellect program (along with the perceptual skills piece) is a licenced program. Those interested in using the program must undertake some training. The level of training received determines what you are able to do or provide to your learners. Information about training in Canada is available from SOI Systems Canada (Connie Grist) at 604-205-9399 or educonnection@shaw.ca. The web address is: www.soisystemscanada.ca

More information is also available at the headquarters of SOI Systems at www.soisystems.com.

*Best Practice....Three Practitioners share their stories***Anne Docherty, Research and Development, Storytellers Foundation, Hazelton, BC****1. Please tell me a little about yourself and your work.**

I work for a non-profit organization called Storytellers' Foundation. Storytellers' started after the first set of Treaty talks with the Gitksan, British Columbia and Canada ended in 1993. I and some colleagues had been involved in public education about the treaty and, although we were told over and over again that people, locally, find it hard to work together, we were witnessing people willing to try and talk with each other, overcome differences of opinion so they could live together as neighbours, and be brave enough to learn about, and talk about, sensitive issues. This inspired us...and so we created Storytellers'. Our mandate is to build a literate citizenship so more of us living in the community can become a decision-maker around issues that impact our lives.

My role in Storytellers' has changed over the years. I am now responsible for research and development. I conduct and/or mentor community based research at the local community level and I engage in national research around literacy and learning. I also design the literacy and community development learning programming for Storytellers and coordinate the Rural Roots Peer Learning network that links literacy and community organizing groups between three communities.



Anne Docherty

2. Please tell me about your work with learners with diverse needs.

We have a community learning storefront called the Learning Shop. This storefront offers community development learning, where people come together to learn what they need, when they need it and in a manner that serves their level of understanding. We see it as real life learning. Our learning programs are always connected to a topical issue in our community. It means that in any given program we have people with diverse learning needs.

We have an ecological approach to our work. We learn from our ecosystems that diversity is critical for life to flourish. We believe this is the same for learning. Because we seek out diversity in people (learners) we have to make sure we have diversity in our teaching tools and methods. Our strategies in working with learners with diverse needs begin by intentional relationship building, we refer to this as "hanging out". We get to know each person and the people that they know before (or as soon as) a program begins. It is critical for us to learn as much as we can about people who are entering our program before the program starts.

We explore what learning environments and styles are comfortable to the learner. Once we know this, we then strategize what might be the "best" practice for this particular group. We pull from our "bag of tricks" which includes our personal experience, lessons learned from past learners, best practices from the literacy field, and research and/or training. Our focus is always on creating an enabling learning environment rather than a disabling learning environment.

This past year we have worked with learners who have autism, mental health issues, physical disabilities and little confidence to engage with others. In the same program we have retired doctors and accountants who are highly literate and very confident. They attend our programming because they don't want to "lose" their literacy skills and want to engage with younger people in a real and meaningful way.

3. Are there any resources that you can recommend?

We've created some of our own resources such as reflective storyboards to help learners process what is going on. We have also adopted and adapted the Ground Up tools from the Ripal site. We really like the novels from Grassroots Press as they have appealed to our learners. We are learning more and more about FASD and we rely on a regional network for information and ideas for teaching strategies. And, for us, the best resource is still colleagues and learners. We have an adult education class in our area that test our new tools and ideas before we introduce them to a more vulnerable group of learners.

New Literacy Resources

New resources to borrow from Literacy BC's Provincial Literacy Resource Centre

At Literacy BC's literacy resource centre you'll find an extensive library of literacy resources. Anyone in BC can borrow materials, at no cost, by mail.

Different Ways of Learning Resources

Vision: seeing the possibilities beyond

https://www.elmoreviews.ca/product_view.php?id=483

Youth literacy website materials on multiple intelligences:

https://www.elmoreviews.ca/product_view.php?id=454

https://www.elmoreviews.ca/product_view.php?id=453

https://www.elmoreviews.ca/product_view.php?id=455

https://www.elmoreviews.ca/product_view.php?id=456

https://www.elmoreviews.ca/product_view.php?id=457

Literacy, equality, and creativity

https://www.elmoreviews.ca/product_view.php?id=352

Family math fun!

https://www.elmoreviews.ca/product_view.php?id=403

Move the body, stretch the mind

https://www.elmoreviews.ca/product_view.php?id=404

For other new resources that you can borrow, go to www2.literacy.bc.ca/resources/newresc.htm or search the online catalogue at www2.literacy.bc.ca/catalogue and order your loans online.

Thanks to ...

Ningwakwe Learning Press and Orca Press for donating books.

Have an idea for a future ELMO Newsletter?

If you have any ideas for future newsletters – themes, resources, people to interview – we would love to hear them!

Contact us

Please contact us for more information, for help using the website, to send us your reviews, borrow resources, or to give feedback. We particularly welcome feedback on the site in order to improve it.

Important Notice:

The Provincial Literacy Resource Centre Library will be closed from November 12 to December 7, 2009.

The Library will be closed because Literacy BC is moving to a new office. As of December 1, 2009, our address will be:

#701, 333 Terminal Avenue, Vancouver BC, V6B 1L8

If you currently have books on loan, there is no need to change Literacy BC's shipping label. All parcels will be forwarded to us.



Tina Chau, Library Technician, packs up Literacy BC's library in preparation for our big move.

Add your voice

Visit www.ELMOreviews.ca and add your voice! You can add a resource, comment on a review, or write a review.

- **Add** a resource to the database that you think others in the literacy field should know about – book, website, or audio-visual.
- **Comment** on someone else's review – what was your experience with the resource?
- **Write** a mini-review – your opinion, short and simple, and star rating of a resource.

If you are someone who is working directly with learners, you may also be interested in writing a field review.

Contact library@literacy.bc.ca to learn how.

Literacy BC, #701, 333 Terminal Avenue,
Vancouver, BC V6B 1L8

604-684-0624 ext. 105 or 1-888-READ-234
library@literacy.bc.ca