Factors that Facilitate Adult Learner Success in the NWT

It Feels So Good Inside.

January 2013

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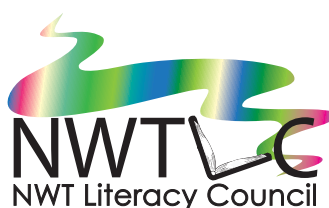
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Summary

This report provides some in-depth analysis about how to facilitate learner success in adult literacy and basic education (ALBE) programs. It builds on the NWT Literacy Council research (2009) into non-academic outcomes.

This report is based on four sources of information:

- A review of relevant literature, with a focus on Aboriginal learners.
- Findings from previous NWT research about non-academic outcomes for adult learners.
- Information from an adult learner focus group in Behchokǫ̀, with eight male and two female learners.
- Interviews with three adult education instructors in Behchokǫ̀ and Yellowknife.

Adult learners describe their success in terms of improved reading, writing, math, and analytical skills. In the NWT, and elsewhere, we tend to use these academic outcomes or human capital to measure success. We define human capital as skills related to jobs and the economy.

But learners go further than that. They describe their success as gaining life-enhancing personal, practical, and relationship skills, and more positive attitudes and behaviours towards life and learning. Adult learners and their instructors have long identified personal and social achievements, or social capital, as indicators of success in ALBE programs.

> *...adults here are serious. You're learning for your life and your kids... That's another reason I'm here – I want to be a good example for my brother and sisters.*
>
> – Jennifer

> *Going back to school gave me more confidence and taught me a lot. And I was learning lots and there were other people. It was good.*
>
> – John

Social capital is intrinsic to learning processes, fundamental to lifelong learning, and necessary to reap the socio-economic benefits of adult education and training. Human and social capital are interdependent concepts. When we consider them as such, we open up new ways to understand the outcomes of ALBE programs. Valuing both academic and non-academic outcomes is consistent with the stated philosophy of adult basic education in the NWT. The NWT Literacy Strategy calls for the following actions:

- Do research into learning barriers and academic success factors; non-academic outcomes.
- Develop and implement interventions and learning supports, including tutoring support, for adult learners.
- Incorporate prior learning assessment and recognition (PLAR).

The literature categorizes the barriers that adult learners face in many different ways. These barriers are interrelated, and we need to look at the root causes to better understand them. Four common types include:

- **Situational:** barriers related to a learner's circumstances, such as family responsibilities, and lack of money, housing, childcare.
- **Attitudinal:** barriers related to how learners see themselves, such as embarrassment, shame, lack of confidence, low self-esteem.
- **Academic:** barriers related to negative experiences with school, such as residential school, leaving school early, lack of family support, poor grade level skills.
- **Institutional:** barriers related to education policy and practices, such as strict attendance rules, not recognizing prior learning, lack of student supports and resources, high fees.

...I knew there was more out there for me. I got tired of the same routine – and the money barely gets me by. I woke up one day and said, "That's it. I'm going to do something."
– Jennifer

To facilitate adult learner success we need to overcome the many barriers that adult learners face, and develop and value both human and social capital. Learners need social capital – the personal and practical skills, to access and apply human capital or academic skills. The interdependent nature of academic, personal, and social achievements is a consistent theme. This report identifies eight strategies for the NWT.

1. Target the situational barriers that learners face. These include lack of supports to deal with conflicting responsibilities in the home and family, including childcare, finances, and housing issues.

2. Implement prior learning and assessment recognition (PLAR) in ALBE programs. Give priority to this policy and use creative ways to document and recognize PLAR.

3. Take an integrated 'whole person' approach to overcome multiple barriers. Apply methods that value what is meaningful and relevant to the learner, respect the learner's context, and recognize the skills and knowledge that learners bring to ALBE programs.

4. Identify and deal with institutional and pedagogical barriers. Balance academic, personal, and social skills development; reflect Aboriginal epistemologies, and adult learner philosophy and principles; develop short teaching and learning modules; support instructors' professional development and recognize their 'extended' roles.

5. Embed learning in practical and realistic contexts, particularly for learners with lower levels of skills.

6. Balance academic and non-academic outcomes, both in practice and in assessment.

7. Recognize and support key transition points in people's lives, such as parenthood. Target the root cause of barriers, such as lack of academic preparedness, lack of confidence, or lack of financial or childcare support.

8. Recognize the time it may take some learners to complete programs.

This is a great learning centre. If you want to see success, you have it right here.

– Jackie

Introduction

This report summarizes the current thinking on non-academic outcomes, adult learner successes and challenges, and prior learning assessment recognition (PLAR) under the following themes:

- What is adult learner success?
- Things that get in the way of success.
- Factors that facilitate success.
- Supporting adult learner success in the NWT.

This report provides some evidence about the importance of non-academic outcomes and the need to embrace them when we assess adult learners in the NWT.

It is based on these sources of information:

- A review of relevant adult literacy and basic education (ALBE) literature, with a focus on Aboriginal learners.
- Findings from previous NWT research about non-academic outcomes for adult learners.
- Information from an adult learner focus group in Behchokǫ̀, with eight male and two female learners.
- Interviews with three adult education instructors in Behchokǫ̀ and Yellowknife.

Coming back to school means nobody looks down on me. I don't feel degraded.
— Russell

I think I became a bit more independent as a result of going into that program. I was able to do more things on my own, more than when I was in school. I was doing homework and that all the time – making sure my work was done – taking my own responsibility.
— Rob

Background

In the NWT, and elsewhere, we tend to use academic outcomes to measure achievement and success for learners who participate in ALBE programs. In 2009, the NWT Literacy Council carried out a project to document non-academic outcomes (Balanoff, Robinson, Field, Latour, and Vaydik). The project's purpose was to provide a more complete picture of what success means for learners in ALBE programs.

The researchers used oral narrative tools, such as multi-media formats, learner portfolios, and journals, to assess non-academic outcomes. Learners told their stories within a framework of learning as a journey. These oral narrative methods are consistent with Aboriginal ways of knowing, learning, and communicating.

Now I'm not shy like I used to be. Now I can speak out in English – I can speak out for myself.

– Aline

From this 2009 project, we understand that:

- Non-academic outcomes are qualitative, intangible, subjective, personal, and extensive.

- Learners gain much more from ALBE programs than academic outcomes suggest. Learners also experience many positive personal and social non-academic outcomes such as:
  - ✓ Improved self-confidence.
  - ✓ Increased ability to set and achieve goals.
  - ✓ Stronger interpersonal relationships.
  - ✓ New communication skills.
  - ✓ Better practical skills for everyday life.

- When we value non-academic outcomes we can better understand the full extent of learners' achievements, especially among learners who face multiple barriers.

- Learners gain hope and motivation as we understand and value non-academic outcomes.

- Oral narrative tools are an effective way to assess non-academic outcomes.

This ground-breaking project was a starting point and showed the need for further work in this area. It provided some methods, principles, outcomes, and indicators for more holistic ways to assess and value learner success, including non-academic outcomes. The Department of Education, Culture and Employment (ECE), GNWT, asked the NWT Literacy Council to follow up.

ECE was looking for more in-depth information on the challenges or barriers adult learners face, and the factors that facilitate their success. One of the objectives in the GNWT's *Towards Literacy: A Strategy Framework – 2008-2018* is to develop an integrated approach to adult literacy programming, including a broad range of learner supports.

To implement this objective, the Strategy calls for the following actions:

- Do research into learning barriers and academic success factors; non-academic outcomes.
- Develop and implement interventions and learning supports, including tutoring support, for adult learners.
- Incorporate prior learning assessment and recognition (PLAR).

All the quotes in this report are from the adult learners who participated in the NWT Literacy Council research on non-academic outcomes.

…it's like I opened a brand new book and let it out. I'm not shy anymore and I'm happier. Sitting here with friends, all learning together, it's great.

– Gina

What is Adult Learner Success?

In much of the literature on ALBE programs, adult learner success means academic progress. Success means achieving academic milestones, such as advancing to the next level or completing a program. Statistics link success to the labour market; to employment and economic well-being.

This orientation is one reason why adult education policy tends to define success as learners finding a place in the economy. Recent literature describes these outcomes as 'human capital'. We define human capital as the knowledge and abilities a person has that increase his/her value in the labour market (The Centre for Literacy 2010).

Adult learners themselves describe their academic success in terms of improved reading, writing, math, and analytical skills. But they go further than that (Westell 2005).

Learners say they:

- Are more able to get a job or a better job.
- Experience improved quality of life for themselves and their children.
- Get more out of life.
- Are more independent.
- Manage their lives better.

They described their success as completing or doing well in their ALBE programs, and acquiring specific skills and knowledge tied to employment and economic well-being (ibid: 37-47). They also said they were better prepared for further education and employment. They felt:

- Less embarrassed about applying for jobs.
- More able to fill out forms and answer questions.
- More able to work with others and be team players.
- More organized.
- More able to determine their strengths and to set goals.

I came back to school because I've seen everybody else advance and I couldn't advance in the work – either as a labourer or real high paid labourer, because my education was not high enough. I couldn't advance any higher in companies.

– Randy

In the program I liked getting to be with our friends – learning, helping one another. We were all happy to be in the program because we all chum together and do things together – and that was a good feeling.

– Marie

In the NWT research (Balanoff et al. 2009) adult learners identified these same achievements. As well as academic and employment skills, the NWT adult learners described their success as gaining some life-enhancing personal, practical, and relationship skills.

Examples of personal skills learners said they gained:

- Having more self-confidence, self-esteem, and sense of accomplishment.
- Feeling less shy, more able to stand up and speak out, reach out, and have a 'new' voice.
- Being better able to present themselves to others.
- Handling challenges better, including personal problems.
- Being more relaxed, open, and willing to take risks.
- Being more able to stand up for themselves.
- Feeling stronger and happier.
- Experiencing a new sense of commitment to themselves, others, and to learning.

Examples of practical skills learners said they gained:

- Having stronger parenting skills: reading to their children, helping their children with homework, helping their children feel more confident, spending more time playing with their children.
- Becoming a role model for others.
- Being more organized in their day-to-day lives.
- Feeling more confident and able to volunteer and become more involved in their community.

Examples of relationship skills learners said they gained:

- Having better communication skills.
- Improving family relationships.
- Taking greater family pride in their achievements.
- Experiencing more positive attitudes towards them from people in the community.
- Developing strong relationships with other learners.

We had to make bread and all this stuff – things that we didn't know how to make. The instructor taught us how to make bannock and her famous buns. My family eats healthier because I was here.

– Marie

I'm a bit more confident about doing things… I help out in the community – like literacy nights. Whenever there's something going on people will phone me at home and ask, "Do you want to help?" I say, "Sure, what time and day?" And I'll be there.

– Trudy

As well as these achievements, the adult learners in the 2009 research (Balanoff et al.) said that participating in an ALBE program helped them to have a more positive attitude about themselves, learning, life, and work, and a different view of the role of women in society. The learners who participated in interviews and focus groups in the later research on success factors and challenges identified similar achievements.

Interestingly, healing and treatment programs that target Aboriginal people are designed to nurture similar personal, practical, and relationship outcomes (Dion-Stout and Kipling 2003, Chansonneuve 2007, Mussell 2005). These achievements are intrinsic to human resiliency[1], holistic notions of self, and balance in all spheres of human life: intellectual, social, political, economic, psychological, and spiritual. The healing journeys of colonized people the world over seek such outcomes (Kuokkanen 2000).

Adult learners and their instructors have long identified personal and social achievements as indicators of success that result from participating in ALBE programs. A 1997 GNWT report found that learners identified personal development as their greatest success resulting from such programs (ECE, 26). Adult learners felt a strong sense of accomplishment.

They were more exposed to new ideas and they were:

- More confident; more aware of their strengths.
- Better able to help their children with school.
- More interested in learning about and participating in their community; less isolated.
- More positive about the future; setting goals for the future.
- Proud to be good role models.

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[1] Resilience is most often defined as the capacity to spring back from adversity and have a good life outcome despite emotional, mental, or physical distress (Dion Stout and Kipling 2003).

[2] http://www.alternativesnorth.ca/pdf/NoPlaceForPovertyReport_email.pdf

Also, just being out has helped me. When you're a stay-at-home mother for ten years you just see four walls. Your whole life revolves around that. So being out and being around people has made me comfortable. It made me see that there is a whole other world out there.

– Rose

Research in British Columbia documented similar outcomes (Middleton and Bancroft Planning and Research Associates 1999). Adult learners said that participating in ALBE programs helped them:

- Gain specific literacy skills.
- Access more career opportunities.
- Improve personal well-being.
- Gain confidence, which increased with time. Fifty-one percent (51%) reported improved confidence after two months in the program; 77% after five months.

The interdependent nature of academic, personal, and social achievements is a consistent theme. Almost every adult education study shows that learners experience positive personal and social achievements as well as academic and employment related skills and knowledge when they participate in ALBE programs (Westell 2005).

Personal and social skills are "crucial to the ability of people to imagine themselves as lifelong learners and should be supported by governments intent on developing learning cultures, social cohesion, and more educated populations" (ibid, 18). The research into non-academic outcomes among adult learners in the NWT reflected similar findings (Balanoff et al. 2009).

Personal and social skills, along with academic skills, are indicators of healthy, productive economies and societies. Adult learners value these skills as indicators of their successes in adult education and literacy programs. In this way, personal and social achievements of adult learners and non-academic outcomes are synonymous.

More recent literature describes personal and social achievements as social capital. "... Social capital refers broadly to the social connections and understandings between people that enable them to work together, live together, and learn from each other... Recent work on social capital in adult learning and literacy contexts suggests that adults who acquire skills through

I wanted to come back to school because I wanted to learn more about reading and math, so I could help my kids out – help them read.

– Trudy

My life changed when I came back to school. For instance, for me – I was just a housewife, staying at home. I thought I was there just to clean up. When I came here and went home I felt good about myself, like I was at school.

– Elsie

learning and training interventions need social capital in order to apply or transfer the (human capital) skills into everyday use" (The Centre for Literacy 2010, 10).

The Centre for Literacy's work on social capital outcomes reveals extensive benefits to communities, individuals, and learning. The Centre describes social capital as the 'oil to smooth-running social and economic wheels', and the 'glue to social cohesion' that are integral to productive and healthy societies (ibid, 2).

At an individual level, social capital promotes confidence, mobility, resourcefulness, and quality of life. From an educational perspective, "social capital facilitates learning by providing learners with access to the knowledge and skills, or human capital of others" (ibid, 3). The individual and educational benefits are one reason why the Centre advocates for formal recognition of social capital outcomes in ALBE programs.

The OECD, World Bank, and governments in Australia, the United States, the United Kingdom, and Canada have invested in initiatives to learn more about the link between human and social capital, and academic and non-academic outcomes. Policy and program initiatives are shifting "away from an exclusive focus on human capital and economic outcomes" (The Centre for Literacy, 6) to embrace social capital or non-academic outcomes.

The OECD framework of key competencies required in the 21st century (ibid, 12) embeds social capital outcomes. Ireland's approach to adult literacy recognizes personal, social, and economic dimensions. Australia is working toward a national policy based on the 'triple bottom line' – economic, social capital, and community development (ibid, 7). In these and other countries, projects are underway to investigate social capital outcomes of ALBE.

In Canada, the Canadian Council on Learning advocates the link between human and social capital and learning (2009). Social capital outcomes are also implicit in the Government of Canada's definition of essential skills (The Centre for Literacy, 11).

I wouldn't have volunteered for the Arctic Winter Games if I hadn't been in this program. I wouldn't have known about it. I was a cultural guide at these art shows at the Games.

– Sandy

Things that Get in the Way of Success

For decades the literature has focused on barriers to adult learner success, rather than factors that facilitate success (MacKeracher, Stuart, and Potter 2006, 2). This deficit orientation to discussing learner achievement (or lack of it) is a main feature of the 1990s literature. It is particularly prevalent in documenting the experiences of Aboriginal learners (Long, Middleton, ABC Canada, and Literacy BC 2002, 20).

A deficit orientation overlooks learner strengths (Canadian Council on Learning 2007, 24) and misses opportunities to recognize achievements, particularly from the learner's perspective. It also fails to recognize the human and social capital that a learner brings into and takes away from an ALBE program.

Much of the literature discusses barriers to adult learner success in relation to recruitment, participation, and retention issues. Researchers conclude that the factors that cause adult learners to enroll, leave, participate, and/or succeed in programs are highly contextual and interrelated (Long, Middleton, ABC Canada, and Literacy BC 2001). Much of the literature tries to understand the dynamics of numerous barriers to educational success, rather than assigning responsibility to any single barrier (Roussy and Hart 2002, 5).

Still, there is some criticism that the literature often misses "the complex interplay between personal and structural factors" (Long, Taylor, ABC Canada 2002, 21). The literature also lacks gender-specific analysis of barriers to success, particularly barriers confronting adult male learners (MacKeracher et al. 2006, Brigham 2008).

Getting to and from school was another challenge... I live in the old town. If you were to walk it would be an hour – hour and a half maybe.

– Randy

The literature categorizes the barriers that adult learners face in many different ways. The GNWT's literacy strategy (2009) reported six categories that MacKeracher (2006) identified. In categorizing barriers, MacKeracher recognized that some factors, such as childcare and financial support, may be situational, institutional, and/or attitudinal depending on the source of the problem.

The six categories of barriers are:

- Situational
- Attitudinal/dispositional
- Institutional
- Academic
- Pedagogic
- Employment training

1. **Situational:** refers to the multiple or conflicting responsibilities learners have in the home, family, and work; issues related to finances, transportation, housing, childcare, and health; lack of personal support.

Systemic barriers often compound the effects of situational barriers. "Situational barriers are understood as residing within the individual learner, as individual deficits that are the responsibility of the learner. However, inflexibility and lack of concerned support on the part of staff and instructors within educational institutions exacerbate the problems resulting from situational barriers" (ibid, 15).

2. **Attitudinal/dispositional:** refers to learners' low self-esteem, fear, shame, embarrassment, lack of confidence; negative perceptions others have of learners' ability to seek out, register in, attend, and successfully complete a program.

"Most attitudinal barriers are viewed as the result of inadequacy on the part of the learner" (ibid, 18). They are difficult to document, but their impact is devastating.

3. **Institutional:** refers to the limitations inherent in institutional methods of design, delivery, and administration of learning activities – including fees, resources, attendance policy, attitudes towards learners, recognition of prior learning, and student supports.

> *This is a big place compared to the community we came from. When I first came here I was scared. I was always aware of what people would think of me. I was self-conscious a lot of times. My children were a lot more brave than I was. They said, "Mom, don't be scared. Just go."*
>
> *– Mary*

"Sometimes structural (institutional) barriers are hard to recognize because they are based on unquestioning adherence to 'traditional' practice" (ibid, 17).

4. **Academic preparedness:** refers to the literacy and other basic skills that learners need for the classroom environment.

5. **Pedagogic:** refers to how well instructors, facilitators, and administrators understand how adults learn and how to successfully work with the diversity of adult learners' needs.

Too few instructors have a solid understanding of the teaching strategies that best support adult learning. While the "literature on best practices in facilitating adult learning does exist, it is just not being taken into consideration in the design and delivery of many adult learning opportunities" (ibid, 20).

6. **Employment training:** refers to lack of support for training within the workplace.

Low-wage workers tend to have less access to training. Employers and administrators often view them as transient and as having less economic value in the workplace.

In the NWT, situational, attitudinal, institutional, and academic barriers were the most prevalent that adult learners cited in the 2009 research (Balanoff et al.). Barriers included:

- Family responsibilities, conflict with partners, balancing home and school life, childcare, or dealing with family disruption – especially where learners leave home to take courses.

- Financial difficulties, student funding, or having to give up a wage.

- Overcoming fear – usually related to failure or making a commitment, embarrassment, and shame.

- Poor prior educational experiences. For example, forty-five percent (45%) of adult learners felt that the school system had not served them well; sixty-five percent (65%) regretted leaving school early. (Balanoff et al, 32-35).

Low literacy and situational and attitudinal barriers were the most prevalent in a study involving NWT youth with low literacy in the labour force (Little et al. 2010).

My biggest challenge this year has been that my little girl was sick and my grandma was ill. We thought she had cancer, so I spent a week with her. I probably missed two weeks of school. They have limits here of eight days. But, because of the situation, it was out of my control.

– Rose

I didn't really enjoy school before. I like ALBE way better. I didn't really like my teachers in high school... In high school the teachers don't go back to work on things you don't understand – they just move on.

– Katherine

Youth encountered barriers such as:

- Lack of self-esteem and confidence.
- Lifestyles and life circumstances, including alcohol and drug use, computer use throughout the night, and lack of motivation.
- Family responsibilities and demands.
- Lack of childcare or funding for childcare.
- Financial problems, including difficulty keeping up with expenses or needing to help out the family.

Further, youth tended to not ask for help or have exposure to life experiences that reinforce the importance of literacy and education.

Adults and youth in the NWT face similar barriers to those that Brigham documented in a 2008 paper that examines the progress of Aboriginal learners. Brigham's analysis illustrates the interrelationship of situational, institutional, attitudinal, academic, and pedagogical barriers. The analysis also corroborates MacKeracher's finding that we need to look at the source of the problem, or root cause, to better understand barriers.

Brigham identified the following barriers:

- Inadequate financial resources and support (e.g. lack of funding programs).
- Poor academic preparation (e.g. low expectations of Aboriginal students and issues within the K-12 schooling system).
- Family responsibilities and stress associated with moving away from family.
- Lack of student development and services (e.g. access to information and counselling; finding housing).
- Isolation (e.g. institutional attitudes, lack of support services, lack of ownership or control of the education process).
- Exclusion (e.g. racism and experiences that result in low self-esteem).
- Campus climate (e.g. curricula and programs that lack Aboriginal perspectives).

When I first came back it was hard. I had to leave the job that I had worked in for ten years… In my home community, I have my own home. But, here, I have to pay rent.
                                          – Mona

But I think the challenge for a lot of people is keeping your life clean – your social life – especially in small communities. There are so many parties and there are so many things that can distract you from school.
                                          – Rose

While the literature widely discusses institutional, academic, and pedagogical barriers, one study found that adult learners generally don't want to criticize ALBE programs or identify them as a barrier to their success (Roussy and Hart, 5). But Brigham (2008) found that adult Aboriginal learners face significant institutional and academic barriers, particularly when they try to access post-secondary education. These barriers are rooted in systems, policies, and procedures that assume that all students are prepared equally to enter mainstream institutions.

Brigham pointed to the serious public policy issues that arise when 'the players are not equal'. This is often the case among older youth or young adult learners leaving high school in the NWT (Little et al.). Long et al. (2001) also identified institutional program/policy-related barriers for adults who wanted to enroll in literacy and upgrading education. These barriers included:

- Lack of program follow-up.
- Long waiting lists.
- Inconvenient times or locations.
- Inappropriate teaching structure.
- Program costs.

For learners enrolled in programs, situational barriers, such as job-related pressures, money problems, and childcare conflicts, were the most common reasons why adults did not complete the program (ibid).

Some research identifies pedagogical and institutional barriers as daunting for many adult Aboriginal learners. "Many Aboriginal respondents expressed alienation from the structure and values of formal schooling, which seemed at odds with the values of their communities. These feelings were especially pronounced among those who had gone to residential schools or had been formally educated outside of their communities" (Long, Taylor, and ABC Canada 2002, 13).

I wanted to become a teacher or an educator… but my education was very low. I was only at a grade six level.

– Mary

Family was a huge thing for me. I almost quit a few times. One of my uncles committed suicide – that was almost a stopper there. And then my granny got diagnosed with cancer – and I almost stopped there.

– Paul

These feelings reflect and expand on the barriers that the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1996) identified, including:

- Institutional approaches.
- Lack of capacity to teach Aboriginal languages, traditions, and values.
- Racism and discrimination.
- Distrust for the non-Aboriginal education sector.

Malatest and Associates Ltd. (2004) documented the significant and unique challenges that Aboriginal learners in post-secondary institutions face. They categorized the barriers as historical, social, geographic, demographic, cultural, and individual/personal. These barriers are consistent with those others categorized as institutional, academic, and pedagogical.

For example, Malatest found that "many Aboriginal students still see assimilation as a prominent feature of post-secondary education, which has led to an over-arching distrust

and hostility to education in many parts of the Aboriginal community" (11). The post-secondary system does not recognize or respect the cultural knowledge, traditions, and values that students bring (15). Aboriginal students frequently lack adequate academic preparation to access or succeed in post-secondary studies.

Similar to studies in the NWT, and elsewhere, Malatest also identified situational and attitudinal barriers that confront Aboriginal students. Poor self-concept and motivation tend to manifest themselves in a sense of powerlessness, apathy, poor mental and physical health, anger, and frustration. These are also factors in substance abuse, incarceration, and cycles of despair. Factors of "family stress, discrimination, loneliness, and alien environment combine to overwhelm students" (16). Exacerbating this situation is the fact that Aboriginal learners in post-secondary programs are often far away from peer and family supports (14).

What I was afraid of was that I was going to be going to school with Dene people and non-Aboriginals – and I didn't know what they were going to think of me... But it was all support... And that's what really, really made me enjoy the school. It's not racist or anything, it's like wanting to learn all together.

– Mary

A colonial history that includes the legacy of residential schools continues to influence all categories of barriers to learner achievement, including in the NWT. "Educational institutions have been central to the process of colonizing indigenous peoples' minds all over the world" (Kuokkanen 2000, 412-413). The uneven distribution of power, the stigma of 'otherness' and being less valued, and deprivation are among the legacies that contribute to situational, attitudinal, and other barriers. Personal and social well-being significantly influence situational and attitudinal barriers.

But in the NWT, as elsewhere, Aboriginal people are at the lowest level of all wellness indicators, such as personal safety, health, and education. While western societies can "conceive of an increasing number of epistemologies, the politics remain the same: it is Euro-centred thinking as the game master, even as the margins increasingly encroach" (Kuokkanen, 414-415).

Aboriginal people in the NWT still seek full self-determination as individuals and communities. At the same time, academic, institutional, and pedagogical systems and practices continue to create barriers. They still often fail to recognize Aboriginal identity or meaningfully embrace Aboriginal concepts, values, and knowledge.

Quigley (1990) explains the consequences of the privilege that we accord to western education systems (cited by Long, Taylor, and ABC Canada 2002): because the "education system (is) largely founded on middle class values" many adults do not reject learning and education, but rather, reject school and schooling because it infringes on their sense of self and identity (24).

I almost gave up a lot of times because of homesickness. It was my biggest barrier. When people pass away at home I want to go home. Or, if my family is sick, I want to be home.
                                                           – Mary

Factors that Facilitate Adult Learner Success

The literature contains theories and conceptual models to facilitate adult learner success and bridge gaps to respond to barriers that adult learners face (Hart, Long, Breslauer, and Slosser 2002). The theories and models are numerous, ranging from structural, feminist, and resistance theories to congruence and decision-making models.

In general, the literature tends to agree that we might mitigate the lack of adult learner success if we could eliminate barriers, change the design of educational programs, and motivate individuals more (MacKeracher et al., 11). But, overall, the literature is clear that no single strategy is likely to overcome all barriers for all students.

The literature tends to be limited on empowerment theories and models. For example, those that:

- Build on learner strengths.
- Formally connect academic and non-academic outcomes.
- Situate adult learning as a balance of human and social capital development.

But some recent work tries to address these gaps. For example, one analysis of adult learning within a social capital theoretical framework shows the important role of social development in achieving academic outcomes (Taylor, Kajganich and Pavic 2011).

When I find out I can actually do something that I didn't know I could do – it just feels good, like it's easy for me.

– Cecilia

When I was in the ALBE program I had to learn to budget whatever little money I had. So, from that experience, I knew how to control and how to budget my money to last for the whole month. That's one thing I learned how to do from my first year back to school.

– Cindy

Based on an extensive literature review, the analysis contends that social capital is intrinsic to learning processes, fundamental to lifelong learning, and necessary to reap the socio-economic benefits of adult education and training. They conclude that human capital and social capital are interdependent concepts. When we consider them as such, we open up new ways of understanding the outcomes of ALBE programs, especially for adult learners with low skill levels (ibid, 19).

We need to find a starting point to achieve a balance of human capital and social capital outcomes within the adult learning environment. Westell suggests that we need to value what is important to the learner, promote learning within the learner's context, and honour individual experiences (2005, 22-25). This is in line with cognitive theory, which points to a more holistic view of learning. It embraces personal, social, and academic achievements; acknowledges the socio-cultural context; and recognizes prior learning, skills and knowledge as a way to facilitate learner success.

My biggest achievement is being able to be in the real world. You need education to get somewhere.

– Jackie

The NWT Literacy Council's 2009 research project acknowledged many reasons why we do not measure, and therefore value, non-academic outcomes. These reasons include:

- Unclear definitions.
- Complex learning and learning relationships.
- Difficulty qualifying or quantifying improvements.
- The requirement for rigorous accountability.

A traditional ideological and pedagogical focus on human capital that ignores social capital outcomes is another reason (The Centre for Literacy).

Prior Learning and Assessment Recognition (PLAR)

PLAR is a process to identify, document, and validate the skills, knowledge, and values that people gain from life experiences. It recognizes learning that occurs outside formal institutions. It is a way to help individuals reflect on, identify, organize, and describe the extent and length of their learning. It can help a learner gain entry into a program.

An extensive body of research and programs in Canada recognizes the contributions that PLAR makes to developing human and social capital, and to valuing learners' knowledge and skills.

When educational institutions document and validate life learning, they can recognize and assess skills and knowledge within the context of the requirements learners need to access or complete an education program. PLAR has other benefits for learners as well as for the institutions that serve them.

PLAR can:

- Improve access to education.
- Facilitate transitions into and within learning situations.
- Help educators place learners at appropriate levels within programs.
- Eliminate the need for students to study things they already know.
- Reduce student workloads and program costs.
- Help learners develop clear educational goals and plans.

- Improve learner confidence, self-esteem, and motivation to learn.
- Recognize learners' human and social capital.
- Acknowledge culture-based skills and knowledge.

The Prior Learning Assessment (PLA) Centre in Nova Scotia uses the portfolio learning process for PLAR. They report strong evidence of major psychosocial benefits for learners, such as significant improvement in self-confidence, self-awareness, and self-esteem. The process generates learning and personal changes that result in improved employment, incomes, and career prospects (MacKeracher, 21 from Praxis Research and Consulting 2002).

In the NWT, Aurora College established a PLAR policy in 1995, but did not implement it across all programs. In 2011 the College began to implement a new PLAR policy.

When people come back to school – maybe other people think they are not very good at math or English, but they have lots of other skills. For example, I like building things.
– Colin

I'm good at most of the things during my youth, in my twenties, and that. I like to do everything; going out on the land. I like to work with things; to get my hands on things.
– Dion

Alternative Approaches to Assessments

The literature is rich with evidence that social capital – non-academic personal and social outcomes – is essential to maximizing human capital. Non-academic outcomes are also fundamental to the successes learners gain when they participate in ALBE programs.

Although measuring social capital or non-academic outcomes is challenging, extensive research is uncovering promising practices to address these issues.

- The 2009 research in the NWT and other literature identified tools and approaches that are consistent with Aboriginal ways of learning and knowing, and treat the learner as a whole person, with skills and strengths in many areas.

- Research in Australia recommended key social capital indicators and a 'portfolio of instruments' to assess and acknowledge learning outcomes specific to individual learners or cohorts of learners (The Centre for Literacy, 15).

- A literacy project in British Columbia recommended measuring non-academic outcomes using a multi-media approach that involved journals, goal setting, anecdotal reporting, end of term reports, and questions for developing awareness (Battell 2001).

- A research project in the United States suggested an 'inputs to impact grid' as a tool to accord equal value to inputs and outcomes for learners (Westell, 14).

- Sawa (2010) offered a variety of tools to assess non-academic outcomes.

- A 'standards wheel' of learner roles as parents or family members, citizens or community members, and workers was at the heart of accounting for non-academic outcomes in an American literacy strategy (Westell, 16).

- Kuokkanen advocated using art as a tool to assess knowledge in Aboriginal cultures.

Before I came to this program I would never have seen myself teaching Slavey. Now I've got the confidence to teach other people.
– Jonas

Most commonly, the literature recognizes that a 'one size fits all' approach to non-academic assessment does not work. Rather, we need a mix of tools, including self-assessment computer programs, portfolio assessment, interviews or surveys, and sliding scales (Westell, 14).

Practices that provide opportunities for learners to develop social capital (networks) and personal and social attributes also support non-academic outcomes. Most often we find these opportunities in community-based programs and in curricula that recognize the many uses of the outcomes of ALBE programs in adult life.

Overcoming Situational Barriers

Systemic barriers often cause or compound situational barriers. Some of the literature advocates focusing on strategies to help learners overcome situational barriers, particularly poverty among Aboriginal students (Malatest, 23). These strategies would deal with:

- Negative funding experiences that Aboriginal students encounter.
- Needs related to housing, childcare, support networks, and career counselling.

Like Malatest, other literature points to the need to deal with poverty and the related situational barriers that adult learners face (Long et al. 2001). To get at the "complex relationships between poverty and low literacy skills," Long pointed "to a real need to address the financial obstacles of low income learners to participating and remaining in adult literacy education" (81-82).

For me the challenge of coming back to school was mostly a personal challenge.
— John

Now I have a young one. It's a lot harder with babysitters, money, and everything.
— Janice Kendra

For example, partnerships between literacy programs and childcare providers, and subsidies for on-site or community-based childcare spaces are possible ways to remove childcare barriers. Providing basic workplace education programs is a way to address job-related barriers. For people with lower levels of literacy, whose work is unpredictable, intermittent, or precarious, Long recommended "community-based programming designed to accommodate the(se) work patterns" (82).

Much of the literature advocates for initiatives that address situational and institutional barriers associated with attracting and retaining adult learners. Roussy and Hart (2002) suggested flexible programs that meet a variety of learner needs and consider different work schedules, childcare and money issues, and personal and health problems. For example, they recommended:

- To improve enrollment: give priority to ensuring good first impressions. Promote the program to the potential learner's family and friends. E.g. with testimonials from successful learners, or with 'yes, you can' messages that help build self-esteem.

- To support retention: help students deal with challenges they might face coming into the program; know when a learner leaves (so they don't fade away); build a community of support learners; invest in more resources.

Overcoming Pedagogical and Institutional Barriers

The literature draws from post-colonial theory to guide how best to facilitate adult learner success. Kuokkanen (2000) contends that adult learners from non-western cultures will continue to face barriers to success in academic programs until educational institutions embrace the values and epistemologies of other cultures, especially the holistic epistemologies of Aboriginal cultures (417).

Post-colonial theorists argue that, as key players in colonization, educational institutions have a critical role in the decolonizing processes. To be active players in decolonization, these institutions need to incorporate and seek a balance of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal epistemologies to overcome pedagogical and institutional barriers (Kuokkanen 2000, Malatest 2004).

One of the things I liked best was in the spring when the instructor took us on the land – for a picnic and to do other things. It makes you feel good.

– Elsie

This requires a policy shift away from an economic, human capital orientation and bias to a policy base that encourages and supports adult learners to build social capital as well as achieve personal and academic goals (The Centre for Literacy 2010, MacKeracher et al. 2006, Hoddinott 1998). The recommended policy framework values outcomes that are relevant and meaningful to the learner, acknowledge the learner's context, and are closely linked to community and individual needs.

One reason for this policy shift is to help close the achievement gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal learners. Healing and treatment programs advocate for similar approaches. They recognize that "manifestations of one's culture (for example, traditions, ceremonies, and language) are often important sources of pride and self-esteem, serving to support individuals in their struggles against adversity" (Dion Stout and Kipling, 2003: 23).

Malatest (2004) suggested that a shift in institutional and pedagogical policies would:

- Help Aboriginal students secure appropriate qualifications (e.g. through access programs).
- Ensure community delivery, involve communities in planning and delivering services, and train participants to satisfy community needs.
- Support Aboriginal control, including creating Aboriginal institutions like the First Nations University of Canada, or partnerships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal institutions.
- Develop curricula that respect Aboriginal epistemology and languages.
- Consider alternative approaches to assessments (23).

I'm trying to learn my traditional life as well as be able to live in today's society.
– Esther

Key Transitions

Adults resist returning to adult education or literacy programs for many reasons. These include poor early school experiences, beliefs that they are too old for school or that school is irrelevant to daily life, and uncertainty about the intentions of schools and teachers (Long, Taylor, and ABC Canada 2002).

Overcoming these academic, attitudinal, institutional, and pedagogical barriers are among the reasons that several researchers are in favour of focusing on key life transitions (e.g. becoming a parent, losing a job) as the way to facilitate learner success (Long et al. 2002, Hart et al. 2002).

Researchers also advocate interventions at key transition points when adults consider an education or training program but may not pursue the program "because they were coping adequately without enrolling in a program" or other factors intervened and prevented them from pursuing the idea. These might include "needing to support a family, feeling they were too old, or imagining that classes would be too hard" (Hart et al. 2002, 120).

Transitions can be especially difficult for adult Aboriginal learners because of academic barriers, such as being less academically prepared, along with a host of other barriers (MacKeracher et al. 2006). Different demographic characteristics among these learners also impact transitions.

"Aboriginal students are a few years older than other students on average. Almost three out of four Aboriginal university students and two out of three Aboriginal college students are female – a greater proportion of women than in the general post-secondary population. Compared to the general student population, Aboriginal students are more likely to be married or in a long-term relationship, more likely to have children, and more likely to come from small communities, often far from their educational institution… (and) supportive infrastructure" (Holmes 2005, 1).

…I ran into the community's ALBE instructor. I told her how I was feeling and she said, "How about going to school? Have you ever thought about going back to school?" I thought, "Yeah, maybe I should. I can't be here forever working in a store, doing this and that."

– Jennifer

Aboriginal males are less likely than other males to be engaged in ALBE programs (Brigham 2008). Brigham proposed four transition strategies to address institutional and academic barriers:

- Access programs to assist with general admission.
- Preparatory programs to facilitate program admission.
- Designated seats.
- Alternative admissions criteria.

MacKeracher advocated for policies that recognize that Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal adults are not coming from the same place in terms of being prepared for further learning. Solutions included recognizing informal or prior learning. Active engagement in informal learning is strongly related to education attainment and skill levels. Individuals who have engaged in community rather than institutional-based learning have difficulty accessing and making the transition to institutional learning (12).

Multi-faceted, Integrated Approaches

Adult education policy and practices that facilitate learner success are broadly-based, multi-faceted, and integrated (Long, Taylor, and ABC Canada 2002). They build human and social capital, and value both academic and non-academic outcomes. Evolving policy and practices that facilitate success means thinking "well beyond the conventional boundaries" and adopting "longer-term, policy-based strategies aimed at building a system for adult basic education to replace current piecemeal arrangements" (Long, Middleton, ABC Canada, and Literacy BC 2001, 13).

Many jurisdictions, including the NWT, have some history of supporting personal and social development within adult education programs, but without assigning formal measures or values to these outcomes. These programs acknowledge and respond to adults' needs, are learner-centred, accessible, community-

I managed one semester and now I'm doing the next one. It's quite a challenge when you have lots of kids.

– Mabel

I think job shadowing was also a big success for me. I job shadowed at the friendship centre – and now I volunteer for the friendship centre.

– Marie

based, coordinated, integrated, and provide transferable learning opportunities (ECE 1997, 36). They:

- Nurture learner readiness to move forward.
- Provide supports that foster family stability and encourage community support.
- Offer childcare, financial support, and counselling.

ECE's 1997 report, *A Bridge to My Future*, identified examples of more holistic adult learning programs that developed both human and social capital and facilitated learner success. The programs were the NWT Training Centre in Inuvik, the Tree of Peace Adult Upgrading in Yellowknife, and Soaring Eagle Friendship Program and the Hay River Reserve Adult Education Program in Hay River/K'atl'odeeche. Unfortunately, some of these programs no longer exist.

Research into youth literacy needs in the NWT identified a multi-faceted system of supports as a way to facilitate success among these learners (Little et al. 2010). The research recommended a range of flexible and short-term academic, life skills, and work-related learning modules. The modules should include programs that help youth overcome life challenges, offer free or inexpensive childcare, and address family and financial problems. The research recommended community-based programs as a means to do this, particularly ones that build connections among local programs, and support life skills and personal development.

The Ottawa-Carleton District School Board VOICE project endeavours to link human capital and social capital within an ALBE program environment. VOICE takes an integrated approach to build self-esteem and self-awareness, promote engagement in non-academic activities that connect adult learners to the larger social and work environment, and help learners find their voice and place in society (Connolly 2009).

I've been finding out what I'm interested in – finding out what my strengths and weaknesses are. I didn't know that I was so into the environment until I came here.

– Jennifer

The VOICE project helps adults:

- Make informed decisions.
- Expand their perceptions.
- Find a suitable working life.
- Manage time.
- Interact and communicate effectively.
- Access or create opportunities.
- Take action to move towards their goals.

"Without promoting these characteristics in our learners, we deny them the courage needed to overcome their fears" (2). The VOICE project also addresses key employability skills, such as effective communication, working with others, continuous learning, document use, computer use, problem solving skills, and personal management decisions.

The New England Adult Persistence Project is an example of a strengths-based, multi-faceted approach to facilitate learner persistence and success in ALBE programs (Nash and Kallenbach 2009). The Project is based on the belief that positive supports "may be more critical to increasing persistence than the removal of barriers" (4). The Project involved 18 adult education programs and four types of strategies that build on learners' social and human capital, such as supportive relationships inside and outside the class, clear goals, and sense of self-determination. Most of the programs focused on one strategy with little increase in funding.

The New England Adult Persistence Project used four types of strategies designed to meet six inter-related needs (63). The strategies affect each category of barrier impacting adult learner success.

This program is a women's program... It's different than anything else I've ever tried to do. It just seemed like it'd be lots fun and I thought I'd learn a lot out of it.

– Julia

Going back to school made me a better person. I can do so many more things now than before coming back – so I'm glad I came back.

– Katherine

The four types of strategies are:

- Intake and orientation (information, expectations, options, relationships) that helped students get a strong start and demonstrated a lasting impact on both attendance and course completion (19).

- Instruction and learning options (inside and outside the classroom) that increased the attendance rate because strategies affected the quality of the daily classroom experience.

- Counselling and peer support (non-instructional supports, peer support networks, and confidence building) that improved the completion rate, mainly because problem-solving, and ongoing support and encouragement were most effective in helping students find ways to complete the program.

- Re-engagement (at risk interventions through on-line work and study drop-in/resources) that brought learners back into the classroom.

The six interrelated needs are:

- Sense of belonging and community.
- Clarity of purpose.
- Agency/the capacity to make things happen through one's own actions.
- Competence/self-efficacy.
- Relevance.
- Stability.

The last time I went to this program my math and English weren't very good. And then I came back again. I can see that I'm making some progress.

– Maggie

Supporting Adult Learner Success in the NWT

The GNWT's *Towards Literacy: A Strategy Framework – 2008-2018* sets the course for supporting success among adult learners in the NWT. It provides a broad framework to move forward. But it is clear from the literature that no one strategy can deal with the complex and multiple barriers that adult learners face.

We need to employ multiple strategies, particularly those that hold the greatest potential to facilitate learner success in the NWT.

1. **Target the inordinately challenging situational barriers that learners face. These include lack of supports to deal with conflicting responsibilities in the home and family, including childcare, finances, and housing issues.**

> *[The local Dene Band] is paying me to do this. If that wasn't the way, I wouldn't be here... If it wasn't for them funding us, none of us would be here.*
>
> – Rose

Situational barriers reflect the life circumstances of individuals; systemic barriers often compound situational barriers. An opportunity exists to address these types of barriers through a number of current initiatives. Anti-poverty efforts underway within the Government of Canada, Government of the NWT, and voluntary sector provide a unique opportunity to address some systemic barriers.

For instance, childcare, housing, and income support were a main focus of a territorial anti-poverty workshop held in Yellowknife in October 2010[2]. Anti-poverty efforts can bring agencies together to take collaborative action on systemic and situational barriers. The current review of ALBE programs offers another opportunity to address issues like the financial barriers that many learners face. In addition, the current Aboriginal Student Achievement initiative will identify ways to overcome childcare issues for some learners.

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[2] http://www.alternativesnorth.ca/pdf/NoPlaceForPovertyReport_email.pdf

2. Implement prior learning and assessment recognition (PLAR) in adult education and literacy programs in the NWT.

PLAR takes a strengths-based approach to assessment and is thus an empowering process for adult learners. It promotes self-esteem and confidence, and helps learners recognize and value the strengths they bring to learning. This starts them off from a position of strength at the beginning of their return to school, and can go a long way to help learners overcome the initial fear many experience when they first return to formal education.

Given the many benefits of PLAR to addressing attitudinal, academic, and pedagogical barriers, we need to give priority to implementing this policy. We also need to think outside the box in terms of the ways in which PLAR is documented and recognized.

3. Take an integrated 'whole person' approach to addressing multiple barriers. Apply methods that value what is meaningful and relevant to the learner, respect the learner's context, and recognize the skills and knowledge that learners bring to ALBE programs.

If this program was just reading, writing, and math I don't think it would have been as good. Slavey was a really important part of the program for me.

– Jonas

Holistic approaches to education, barriers, and success factors reflect Aboriginal ways of being, knowing, and doing. Whole person approaches to learning are not new concepts in the NWT. Nor is the need to program in ways that empower people and support their potential to influence positive change in their own life or the lives of others.

We find a more holistic and integrated view of education in the GNWT's *Dene Kede* curriculum for NWT schools. The curriculum encourages capable, skilled people with respectful relationships with themselves, others, and the natural environment[3]. We also find more holistic notions of self, personal development, and discovery as lifelong processes and fundamental to human resiliency and success as fundamental principles of healing and treatment programs (Dion-Stout and Kipling 2003, Chansonneuve 2007, Mussell 2005).

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[3] http://www.ece.gov.nt.ca/divisions/kindergarten_g12/curriculum/Dene%20Kede%20Curriculum%20Document/Dene%20Kede%20Teacher%20Resorce%20Manual.pdf

Aurora College makes an effort to acknowledge and value the languages and cultures of learners through activities like Culture Week. These activities recognize where learners come from and help promote a strong sense of self. This characteristic is fundamental to resiliency and success.

We need to place more emphasis on revitalizing, implementing, and sustaining policies and practices that support holistic strengths-based approaches that embrace both non-academic and academic outcomes and build human and social capital.

4. Identify and address institutional and pedagogical barriers.

The literature contends that we can realize real benefits from institutional and pedagogical change. We need to:

- Broaden adult education policy to balance academic, personal, and social skill development.

- Embrace multiple epistemologies. Given the history of education in the NWT and the make-up of the population, we need to reflect a broader view of learning than the current system of Euro-centred epistemology. We also need to build in decolonizing processes that promote healing and enable people to move forward with confidence.

- Ensure systems and practices reflect adult learner philosophy and principles. Learners who were interviewed for the non-academic outcomes research in the NWT appreciated the difference in approach between ALBE programs and school programs, and acknowledged strongly the role this played in their success.

- Develop short teaching and learning modules that enable learners to experience quick success in easy steps, rather than over a much longer time period.

I like learning now – but not when I was in grade school. I feel different about it now. Maybe it's having such a good teacher.
                                                    – Maggie

- Support the professional development of educators through orientation and ongoing training. And recognize the time that many adult educators in smaller NWT communities invest in helping learners overcome barriers. They play multiple roles, often including that of counsellor. These multiple roles are over and above the role they have as instructors. Educators need more support to understand what resources are available within their communities and regions to take on or help with some of this work.

5. Embed learning in practical and realistic contexts, particularly for learners with lower levels of skills.

Research shows that embedded learning, or taking an integrated approach to learning, is an effective way to promote learner success while still addressing the required curriculum. Communities throughout the NWT have experience offering integrated programming.

For example, the Native Women's Training Centre in Yellowknife offers a strong work placement component in its adult education program. This provides learners with an opportunity to appreciate how the skills they are developing apply in the real world. The Summer Café, part of Skills Training at the Yellowknife Association for Community Living, is another example of applied or integrated learning. In the past, the Native Artisan program also used this approach.

6. Balance academic and non-academic outcomes, both in practice and in assessment.

The literature is clear that existing measures of learner success in ALBE programs do not accurately reflect the real gains that adult learners make in these programs. Nor do they acknowledge outcomes that adult learners value.

> *In high school it was their job to teach what was in their books... You pass – or you fail and go back and take it again. Here at least you know you're making progress and you're starting to understand.*
>
> - Esther

> *This program had job shadowing – so you got to go to places where you wanted to go. I thought, "I'll try the senior's home." And now that's where I work.*
>
> – Elsie

Valuing both academic and non-academic outcomes is consistent with the stated philosophy of adult basic education in the NWT. We see ALBE programs as "a bridge to further training and employment" and as enabling individuals to gain the skills and confidence to more fully participate in the economic and social life of their communities (ECE 1997, 76). "Personal development, together with academic and work-related skills they gained, meant that programs were a bridge to something else: community involvement, education, or employment" (ibid, 36).

7. Recognize and support key transition points in the lives of individuals.

The literature recognizes that transitions are especially difficult for adult Aboriginal learners and recommends a range of strategies to facilitate these transitions. These strategies are most effective when targeted at the root cause of barriers, such as lack of academic preparedness, lack of confidence, or lack of financial or childcare support.

8. Recognize the time it may take some learners to complete programs.

In the NWT research, some learners talked about how long it took them to overcome some of the barriers.

Most learners face complex and multiple barriers when they come into ALBE programs. We need to give them a fair chance to succeed, and recognize that they may not all be able to do that the first time around. We need to be flexible and give learners the time they need to overcome the barriers they face; to complete their courses and programs.

[My mom] said, "I'm such a lucky woman. I still have my traditional knowledge, my language – yet I can still be in society and work, and do what I have to do to pay my bills." She's got two lifestyles – and she's so lucky to have that. That's what I want to have.
– Esther

It wasn't hard for me to come back to school. I applied for school on and off for maybe about five years. I came back here twice – and twice I quit because things weren't working at home.
– Mary Jane

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