Community-Based Informal and Non-formal Learning

International bodies such as UNESCO, the OECD and the European Union define learning as formal, non-formal and informal.

Formal learning takes place in education and training institutions, is recognised by relevant national authorities, and leads to diplomas and qualifications.

Non-formal learning is learning that has been acquired in addition or alternatively to formal learning. In some cases, it is also structured according to educational and training arrangements, but more flexible. It usually takes place in community-based settings, the workplace and through the activities of civil society organisations.

Informal learning is learning that occurs in daily life, in the family, in the workplace, in communities and through the interests and activities of individuals… In some cases, the term 'experiential learning' is used to refer to informal learning (UNESCO, 2012).

PATHWAYS LEARNING

Non-formal learning is often broken down for policy purposes into two subsets: learning for life and learning for work. The term 'pre-accredited' is sometimes used to distinguish vocationally focussed pathway programs, which attract government support, from other non-formal learning programs.

There is a significant body of research that has identified non-formal community-based learning as a useful means of engaging learners with poor literacy and numeracy skills, and / or poor experiences of schooling, and / or a lack of confidence in their ability to learn in a formal setting, and of setting them on a pathway into employment.

AUSTRALIAN EXAMPLES

Examples of community-based non-formal learning might include:

- short classes held at a neighbourhood house,
- mentoring schemes,
- learning circles,
- volunteer induction and training, and
- U3A groups.

Examples of informal community-based learning might include learning through:

- community men's sheds,
- community-based committees and working groups,
- volunteering,
- public libraries,
- community arts programs,
- community history museums, and
- social activism.

ADULT LITERACY AND LEARNING

A strong body of research suggests that the most effective way for adults to develop their literacy and numeracy skills is by applying them in context for particular purposes.

Community-based informal learning, where adults master texts in order to, for example, take minutes at a community meeting, manage the finances for a netball club, measure out a woodwork project in a men's shed or take a child through story time at the local library, is an effective way to develop literacy. Non-formal learning, where adults work in small groups or individually is similarly supported by the research.

DIGITAL LITERACIES

The proliferation of internet-based new technologies and the speed at which they change has made ongoing informal and non-formal learning a necessity.

There is a strong and growing correspondence between social inclusion and digital literacy.

WHO HAS ACCESS?

Despite its obvious benefits for disadvantaged learners, the vast majority of non-formal adult learning is offered through the workplace in the form of professional development or on a fee for service basis in the community. As a result it is more likely to be accessed by:

- full time workers over part time workers and the unemployed,
- adults with a higher level qualifications over those with a lower level qualifications or no qualifications,
- those working in large companies over those in small and medium enterprises.

Non-formal personal interest learning is also more than twice as likely to be accessed by people living in areas of relatively high socio-economic status than people in areas of disadvantage.

READ THE FULL REPORT:

https://ala.asn.au/wp-content/uploads/2011/02/rethinking-community-based-learning_WEB.pdf