

WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT

Recognising all types of learning



Adults continue to learn throughout their lives whether it's in school or uni, on the job, in the home or in the community, learning doesn't stop when people leave formal education

Continuous, flexible adult education is an integral part of lifelong learning. It gives people the opportunity to develop new skills, knowledge and attitudes, and to adapt to change throughout their lives.

However, policy and public debate tend to be dominated by discussions of qualifications and the institutions that offer them and the importance of non formal and informal learning is often under-recognised and under valued.

THREE TYPES OF LEARNING

A successful approach to adult education recognises the value of formal, non formal and informal approaches to learning.

Formal, non formal and informal learning are terms used by international bodies such as UNESCO, the OECD, researchers and practitioners around the globe.

Formal learning

Formal learning refers to learning that takes place in the education system running from primary school through to TAFE and university that leads to diplomas and qualifications.

Non-formal learning

Non-formal learning is any organised educational activity outside the established formal system. It may or may not follow a set curriculum but it has clear learning objectives. Non-formal adult education aims to build a person's knowledge and skills and helps them realise their goals. In Australia it usually takes place in workplaces and in community-based settings including adult and community education (ACE) centres and other local organisations.

Research shows that non-formal learning works well for learners with poor literacy and numeracy skills; poor experiences of schooling; little confidence in their ability to learn in a formal setting and acts as a bridge into employment or further training.

Examples of non-formal learning include short classes held at a neighbourhood house or community centre; mentoring programs; learning circles; volunteer induction and training or University of the Third Age classes.

Informal learning

Informal learning is learning that occurs in daily life, where we acquire attitudes, values, skills and knowledge from experience and encounters we have at home, at work, in our community and in our leisure time.

Informal learning can happen almost anywhere and involve a wide range of activities such as reading a book, listening to the radio, attending a public lecture, working with colleagues, having travel experiences or taking your child to story time at the local library. Informal learning is sometimes referred to as 'experiential' learning.

Research also shows that one of the most effective ways for adults to develop their literacy and numeracy skills is through informal learning; for example, developing language, literacy and numeracy skills through community gardening or a woodwork project.

Other examples of informal learning include learning through participating in community sheds, committees, working groups, volunteer organisations, community arts programs, galleries and museums or through social activism.

ACE CONNECTS THREE TYPES OF LEARNING

The adult and community education sector in Australia is a major provider of both non formal community-based learning and offers a host of opportunities for local community members to learn by doing through community activities.

The adult and community education sector in Australian has a long history and extensive experience in offering skills based courses and informal learning opportunities.

The ACE sector model of small, local classes that are learner centred and focus on practising skills in informal settings is ideally positioned to meet the needs of communities that will need to increasingly rely on nonformal learning to keep pace with change.

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