

# Module 5: Professional Issues for Practitioners with Deaf & Deaf-Blind Adult Learners

## Introduction:

As practitioners in adult literacy programs, we are committed to lifelong learning. We are always searching for new ways to improve our programs and increase our job satisfaction.

This module will focus on ways practitioners can improve their way of working to have more professional success and personal satisfaction. We will also look at strategies to help our learners experience more success, and to have our classes run more smoothly.

## Goals and Outcomes for Module 5:

- Effectiveness – learner goals are achieved (successful)
- Efficiency – programs run more smoothly with less problems
- Customer Satisfaction – learners are happy with their progress
- Professional Relationships – practitioners connect
- Professional Development – practitioners and managers learn new skills

## Classroom Management:

When you walk into some literacy programs, you might notice a positive energy. The learners are all focused on their work and seem happy to be there. The practitioner is busy, actively helping learners. The program is running smoothly and effectively.

How does this happen? Good classroom management!

Classroom management can mean different things to different people. Most people agree it involves supervising all activity in the classroom and doing what is needed to make sure:

- learning activities keep moving along at a good pace
- learners have a safe place to work

How do you do that?

## Set up Schedules and Standard Procedures

Experienced practitioners know if they want to create a positive and active learning environment, they must have a plan. And, that plan must be made clear to the learners. Learners need to know what to do, how to do it, and how to move on to the next thing.

This can be a challenge for some Deaf and Deaf-Blind learners. Depending on the individual, some may need a lot of direction or one-to-one attention. But by having regular routines the learner can follow, they can gradually become more independent. As they take on more responsibility and become more self-directed, learners tend to work better and have more successes with their learning activities.

Some Deaf and Deaf-Blind learners may still need more help than the practitioner can provide. There may be other issues affecting the learner's ability to focus or work independently. For example:

- Learner does not yet have the confidence to work without help
- Learner does not see how the activity relates to their goals
- Learner is embarrassed or afraid to make mistakes
- Learner is more interested in socializing (chatting)
- Learner may have other stressors outside of the classroom
- Learner has too many needs for the practitioner to handle in a group
- Learner does not want to be in the literacy program
- Learner is having an "off" day

## Behaviour Management:

Once in a while, practitioners have to handle behaviour issues. It is best to be prepared ahead of time. Know what you will do if there is a problem. Most literacy programs have their own policies and procedures for how they will handle behaviour problems. New practitioners need to find out how their agency deals with unacceptable behaviour so they can respond quickly if something happens. A sense of safety, both physical and emotional, makes for a more relaxed and positive environment for everyone involved.

Some learner behaviours are not aggressive, but still can interfere with class activities. As a practitioner, you will need to deal with these daily. Here are a few suggestions:

### How to Handle Different Behaviour Types:

- **Me, Me, Me:** This learner wants too much attention and takes too much class time.
  - Thank the learner for their comments. Tell them they made some good points and now you want to see what other learners think.
- **Off the Point:** This learner asks questions or makes comments off the point. Sometimes this is the class clown.
  - Tell the learner it is an interesting point, but it's not what the class is talking about now. Hold the subject for another day.
- **Talk, Talk, Talk:** This learner makes even simple answers go on and on.
  - Ask the learner to give a short answer.
- **Sorry!:** This learner often says "sorry" and does not have confidence. This is probably a self-esteem issue.

- Use their ideas in your lessons or discussions. Show them the group values their ideas. You may want to tell them they don't have to say sorry.
- **Ask, Ask, Asker:** This learner takes up a lot of class time asking so many questions.
  - Remind the learner that class time is limited. Offer to answer the questions later, or team the learner with another person to guide them step by step.
- **I Know Everything:** This learner is an expert on everything, often adding comments or correcting your lessons.
  - Thank the learner for their comments. Tell them they made some good points and now you want to see what other learners think.
- **You're Right:** This learner wants to avoid disagreement. This may be related to self-esteem.
  - Gently encourage the learner to share their opinion. Discuss how every learner has a right to express their opinions. Teach a lesson on how to debate.
- **I Don't know:** This learner does not answer questions even when they know the answer. They seem to be afraid they might make a mistake. This may be related to self-esteem, possibly because of past experiences.
  - Gently encourage the learner to participate. Make special effort to show the learner that nothing bad happens when other learners give wrong answers. (that's okay; good try; thanks for trying; and so on)

## How to Handle More Difficult Behaviours:

Sometimes practitioners must deal with behaviour that is immature, inappropriate, or violent. It is important to know your agency's policies and procedures for behaviour issues. This is an example of how you might respond to inappropriate behaviour:

1. clearly explain the "rules" and expected behaviour
2. explain the reasons for those expectations and what will happen if a learner breaks those rules

**If** the difficult behaviour continues and interferes with the class, the practitioners should:

1. have a meeting with that learner
2. explain the rules and expected behaviour again
3. try to find the reason for the behaviour and resolve it
4. have the learner sign a "behaviour contract"
5. if the behaviour continues, set up a meeting for the learner with the program manager to resolve the problem

**If** the behaviour becomes worse, the practitioner should:

1. send the learner out of the room
2. contact the program manager or head office
3. write a report about what happened for the program manager
4. the program manager may decide to suspend or exit the learner from the program

**If** the learner is violent or threatens violence, the practitioner should:

1. take the learner out of the classroom, if possible
2. take the learner to the program manager's office, or contact the program manager (the police may be called)
3. write an incident report for the program manager

There are many ways to handle behaviour issues. Make sure you know your agency's policies so you can handle the situation properly.

### **Other Issues in the Deaf and Deaf-Blind Communities:**

- The Deaf and Deaf-Blind communities are very small. Practitioners must often deal with being involved with the learner socially **and** professionally. Know your boundaries. Do not let social issues cross over into the classroom. In the same way, keep all classroom business confidential.
- Limited services for Deaf and Deaf-Blind individuals can sometimes lead to practitioners being over-involved in learners' lives. Be able to refer the learner to the correct agency for their needs, then when the time is right, let go. It is tempting to want to help with more than their literacy needs, but this may end up being more harmful to you and the learner.

### **Learner Retention – Keeping Learners Motivated**

- Follow up with learners often to see that they are satisfied with their progress. Take time for individual meetings with each learner regularly.
- As time goes on, you may find learners losing interest in their studies. Be sure to keep communication open to see how they are doing. Try adding some new activities for variety to help keep their interest up. Give positive feedback and encouragement often, especially when they are having hard times.

## **Administrative Skills & Knowledge**

### **Administrative Responsibility:**

Literacy programs in Ontario are funded by the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (MTCU). When funding a literacy program, MTCU looks at these two things:

- 1) past performance and

## 2) level of service (contact hours predicted for the next year)

MTCU sends a field consultant to do yearly reviews with each program. It is the program manager's responsibility to meet with the consultant and provide information to them. Practitioners can help by making sure program information is recorded properly and on time. Record keeping can include:

- Monthly attendance records
- IMS (Information Management System) data
- Employee absence reports
- Learner intake and exit forms
- Learners' goals
- Referral and tracking information
- Demonstrations of progress
- Transition and follow-up information
- Training support allocations
- Ordering of resources
- Transfer information
- Consent forms

It is so important to make sure your records are correct and up to date. For example: if a learner changes their goal but you did not change the records, it will look like the learner was not successful. You must be very clear and accurate with the records so the MTCU can see your learners' successes.

Contact hours are an important statistic for MTCU. Programs must record the total number of hours spent in all essential literacy services, including:

- Intake and initial assessment
- Goal-setting
- Training plan development
- Training delivery
- Demonstrations
- Follow-up

## Expectations at Work

### Good Communication at Work:

To keep a literacy program running smoothly, you must have good communication at work. Communicating with your program manager and other staff will strengthen your working relationships.

- When you need help, ask your co-workers or manager.
- Share information. In the field of Deaf and Deaf-Blind literacy, there are very few resources. Sharing resources benefits everyone.
- Support your co-workers. Work as a team.
- Most practitioners have a strong desire to help people. They often take on too much work - then experience burn out. Try to delegate tasks to share the workload. Know your limits, set boundaries, and say “no” if you have to.
- Meet with other practitioners to brainstorm ideas. Work together to find ways to solve problems and create new resources.
- Remember, learner information is confidential. This is especially important with Deaf and Deaf-Blind learners as the communities are so small.
- Conflicts with co-workers or learners can happen. Remember to be professional and respectful.
- Go to staff meetings. Know what is going on in your agency, and don't be afraid to add comments or suggestions.
- No one is perfect. Be willing to accept criticism from your peers and manager. It will help you learn and grow.



## **Policies and Procedures:**

Literacy programs all have their own way of doing things. For example, some programs may be very formal and expect you to behave in a particular way. Others may seem less formal and relaxed. As a new practitioner, you will need to know the expectations and workplace culture of where you will be working.

The general rule is: **employees working in education will behave in a professional way.** But what does that mean? It depends on where you work. Read your agency's handbook of policies and procedures. Watch and communicate with your co-workers to find out the "unwritten rules" of the agency, what "their way" is.

Literacy agencies usually have written policies and procedures. These are easy to access and understand. For example, are practitioners allowed to:

- wear jeans to work?
- date another practitioner?
- use computers for personal e-mails?
- drive learners in your car?
- show a rented video to the class?

## **"Our Way"**

The "unwritten rules" are more about personalities; how the group works together; different teaching styles; who makes coffee in the morning; and so on. You will learn these as you go along. It is important for you to find your place in the workplace culture. You can't be fired if you don't fit in, but your life will be more peaceful if you do fit in.

## **Hostile Environment**

Occasionally, a workplace may feel unfriendly. There may be many conflicts among staff. You will need to think about how you will act in this

situation. There is no written rule about what you should do, but it makes sense that you be positive and professional.

## **On-going Professional Development**

### **Professional Self-Evaluation:**

Doing a self-assessment can have many benefits for a practitioner. For example:

- help you see your own professional skills
- show you areas for self-improvement
- help you decide what goals to set for yourself
- give you direction for on-going learning
- help you build your professional portfolio
- help you create better programs for your learners

The Adult Literacy Educators' Core Skills List is a useful tool in assessing your professional skills. It may also show you where you need more training and skills development.

Have a look through the list now and see how you do...

## **Adult Educator Core Skills List:**

### **I. Approaches to Adult Learning and Learners**

**Create a positive learning environment for all learners  
(social, financial, and cultural backgrounds)**

Practitioners demonstrate their skills in these ways:

- accepts and supports different social groups

- considers problems that affect learning (abuse, health, housing, disabilities, anger)
- uses strategies to help learners understand and accept each other
- adapts learning activities to match individual learning styles, goals, and behaviours
- makes the classroom a place of trust and teamwork

## **II. General Teaching Methods and Strategies**

### **Develop learning activities and outcomes to match learners' goals**

Practitioners demonstrate their skills in these ways:

- meets with learners to find their goals, and plans learning activities and outcomes based on on-going assessments
- includes the learners' knowledge and experience in learning activities
- develops lessons to match literacy level
- provides skills training to match the learners' goals

### **Encourage individual planning, work, and growth in a group setting**

Practitioners demonstrate their skills in these ways:

- encourages learners to share ideas, ask questions, make comments and work as a team
- answers learners appropriately
- encourages class to work cooperatively (teamwork)
- accepts and gives feedback
- shows understanding of how individual learners participate (depending on culture, personality and so on)
- assists independence and self-directed learning
- assists learners in developing realistic goals

## **Select, adapt, and create learning materials and resources**

Practitioners demonstrate their skills in these ways:

- creates learning activities to match a variety of learning styles, experiences, and skill levels
- uses clear language with learning activities
- follows literacy learning levels when making or adapting activities
- encourages the use of computers and information technology for developing literacy and numeracy skills

## **Communicate effectively in a learning environment**

Practitioners demonstrate their skills in these ways:

- prepares statistics and program information
- uses effective communication skills
- teaches clearly, with proper style and at the right speed
- encourages and responds to learner feedback

# **III. Teaching Communications and Numeracy**

## **Develop strategies for teaching reading, writing, and English communication (written)**

Practitioners demonstrate their skills in these ways:

- assesses learners' initial level in reading, writing and communicating in English
- creates lessons plans to match learners' goals
- teaches and provides learning activities that support real life learning
- uses many different teaching methods to help learners develop skills, including: comprehension, spelling, grammar, vocabulary

### **Develop strategies to teach numeracy**

Practitioners demonstrate their skills in these ways:

- assesses learners' initial level in numeracy
- creates a plan for teaching numeracy skills
- teaches the learner to apply math concepts and skills to word problems
- provides activities that support real life learning
- helps learner transfer math skills to daily life situations

## **IV. Assessment and Evaluation**

### **Use the proper tools and procedures to do initial, on-going and final assessments and evaluations**

Practitioners demonstrate their skills in these ways:

- uses proper assessment tools
- meets privately with individual learners regularly
- provides opportunity for learners to assess their own strengths and needs

### **Use a goal-directed assessment process for initial assessments**

Practitioners demonstrate their skills in these ways:

- records information about the learners' past education and employment
- helps learners identify realistic short and long-term goals
- identifies communication and numeracy skills needed for learners' goals

### **Use on-going assessment and evaluation process**

Practitioners demonstrate their skills in these ways:

- uses appropriate demonstrations to show learners' progress
- assesses and records progress using real-life tasks
- works with the learner when modifying training plans, making goals more clear
- gives feedback to learner regularly, formally and informally

### **Use final assessment and evaluation for exit**

Practitioners demonstrate their skills in this way:

- relates the exit assessment to the learner goals from their training plan

## **V. Participates in Professional Development**

### **Assess professional strengths & needs and improve knowledge & skills**

Practitioners demonstrate their skills in these ways:

- assesses own skills and knowledge
- sets challenging goals for personal and professional development
- is involved in on-going professional development activities