



LinkedIn Learning

FIELD CONSULTATION REPORT

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The views expressed are those of AlphaPlus and do not necessarily reflect those of the Province of Ontario.



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LinkedIn Learning Report

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AlphaPlus is enormously grateful to all the literacy and basic skills (LBS) practitioners who collaborated with us on this project for their hard work, thoughtful expertise and invaluable insights. Your dedication and wisdom makes our field richer and moves us forward.

Nine of the ten project participants agreed to be listed here:

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Purpose

In 2017, AlphaPlus approached LinkedIn Learning to explore opportunities to deploy its online learning platform for staff working in the least-resourced employment and training programs in Ontario that are funded by the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (MTCU), namely Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) programs in school boards and community-based organizations.

Several opportunities converged to make this an ideal moment to undertake an assessment of the effectiveness of LinkedIn Learning as a targeted solution. First of all, Employment Ontario (EO) practitioners are more engaged in online learning than ever before and small-scale studies of adult educators have shown high acceptance of on-demand, 24/7 e-learning platforms. Second, the Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Development (MAESD - now MTCU) had recently purchased licences allowing faculty, staff and students in every college and university across the province access to the courses available on the Lynda.com platform. It is worth examining whether purchasing more seat licences – for LBS staff in school boards and community-based organizations – is worth the investment by MTCU. Third, our informal survey of LBS staff in school boards and community-based organizations indicates that this group of EO practitioners faces significant barriers to accessing training and ongoing professional development.

The LinkedIn Learning platform could also address the gap in knowledge about how to offer relevant, responsive capacity-building training to a group of educators whose needs are diverse and whose time is extremely limited. There is potential to benefit all of the people who work in LBS programs in school boards and community-based organizations across the province, as well as all of the learners who attend these programs. Our recent survey revealed that there are 466 (full-time equivalent) educators and 380 (full-time equivalent) administrative staff in these LBS programs. We know that by supporting the work of these staff within the LBS sector this project could also benefit the more than 27,500 learners who attend the programs in which these LBS practitioners work.

Workplace Learning – Some Background

The research into workplace learning seems to be directing us to a model of workplace learning that is personalized, self-directed and integrated into a daily workflow. People do not necessarily stop work to attend a course, workshop or conference. Rather, workplace learning is something people do just in time to meet a specific need they encounter as they are planning their work or completing a task.

In [Modern Workplace Learning 2019](#), Jane Hart surveys learning professionals to find out what they thought the [Top Tools for Learning in 2018](#) are and found that according to workplace learning professionals:

1. *For modern professionals, learning is not something that happens just in education or training but happens in many different ways every day both inside and outside work.*

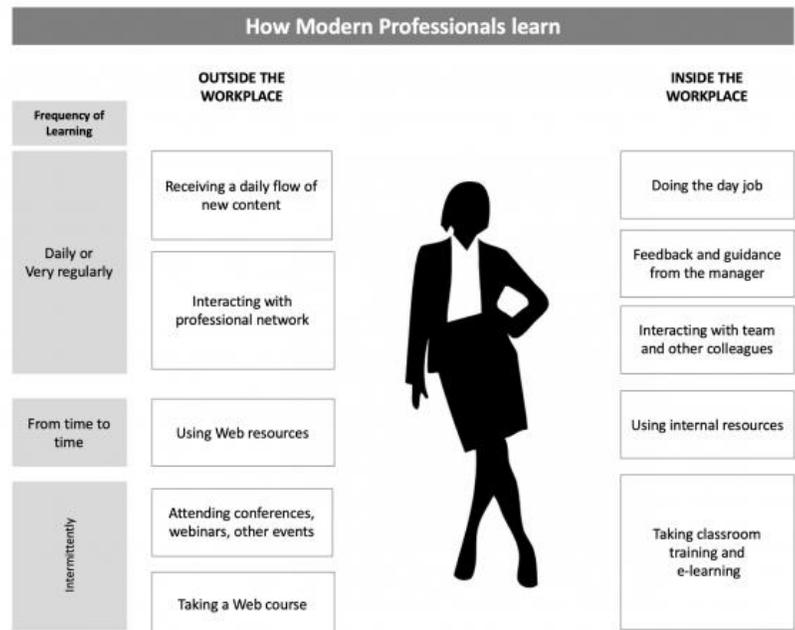
2. *Modern professionals also learn*

- *intermittently – through training and other educational events;*
- *from time to time – as and when needed; and*
- *continuously – daily or very regularly*

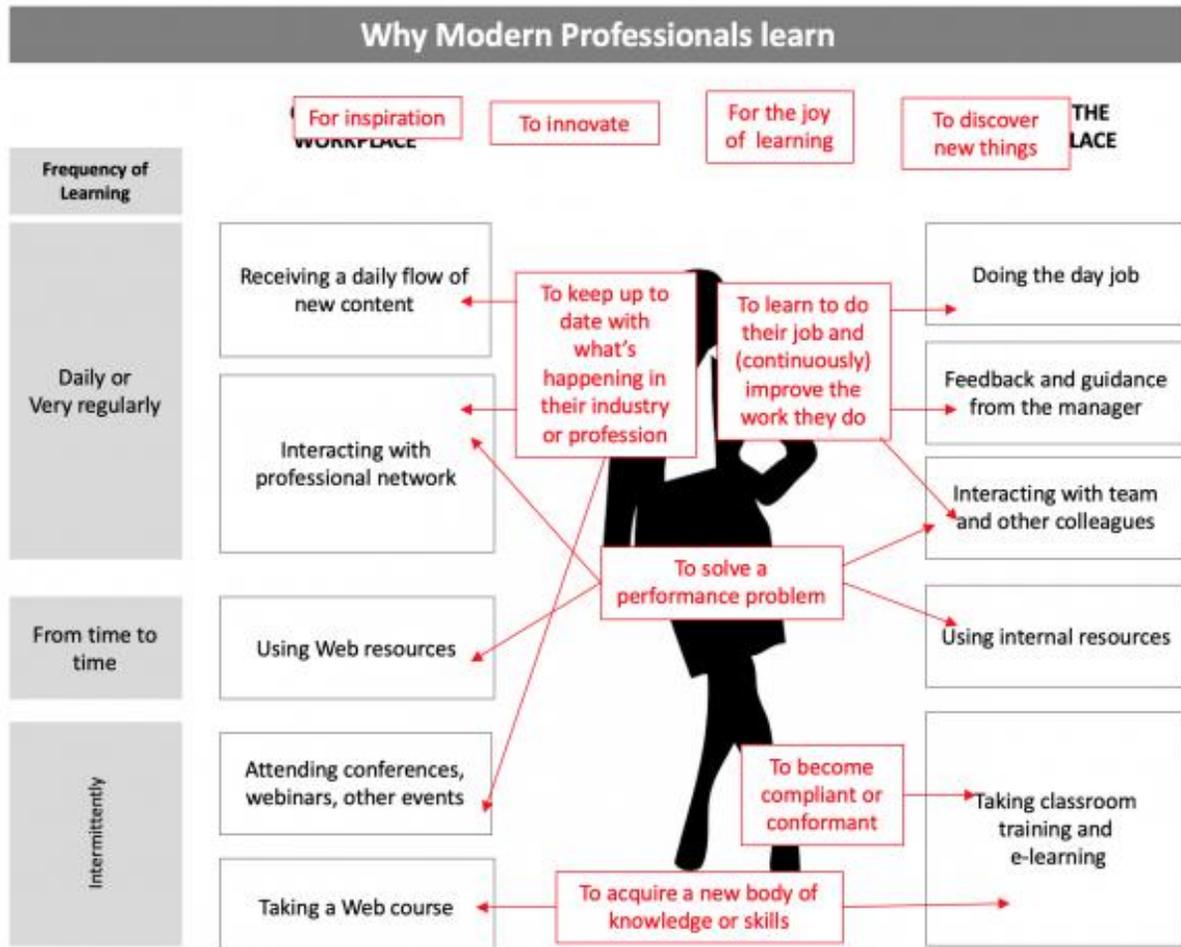
3. *Modern professionals also learn for many different*

reasons – not just because

they have to – to become competent, conformant or compliant in their organisation –



but because they want to, for their own personal and professional reasons. Here are some of those reasons mapped onto this diagram that also shows the frequency of learning and where it takes place.



Whilst organisationally, most initiatives are about designing and managing content and courses for intermittent training, for modern professionals, learning is a personal, continuous process – and at work it mainly takes place in the workflow – as they do their daily job.

from [How and why modern professionals learn by Jane Hart](#)

Jane Hart has been conducting the [Learning in the Workplace survey](#) for seven years.

The survey asks people “to rate the importance (i.e. value and usefulness) of 12 different ways of learning for and at work.”

The results in 2018 (once again) show that for modern professionals the least valued ways to learn at and for work are the traditional workplace learning activities – classroom training and e-learning – whilst the most valued ways to learn for work are the experiences and activities that happen as part of daily work, through interaction with people as well as the use of informal web content.

In fact the significant features of the most valued ways of learning in the workplace, are that they:

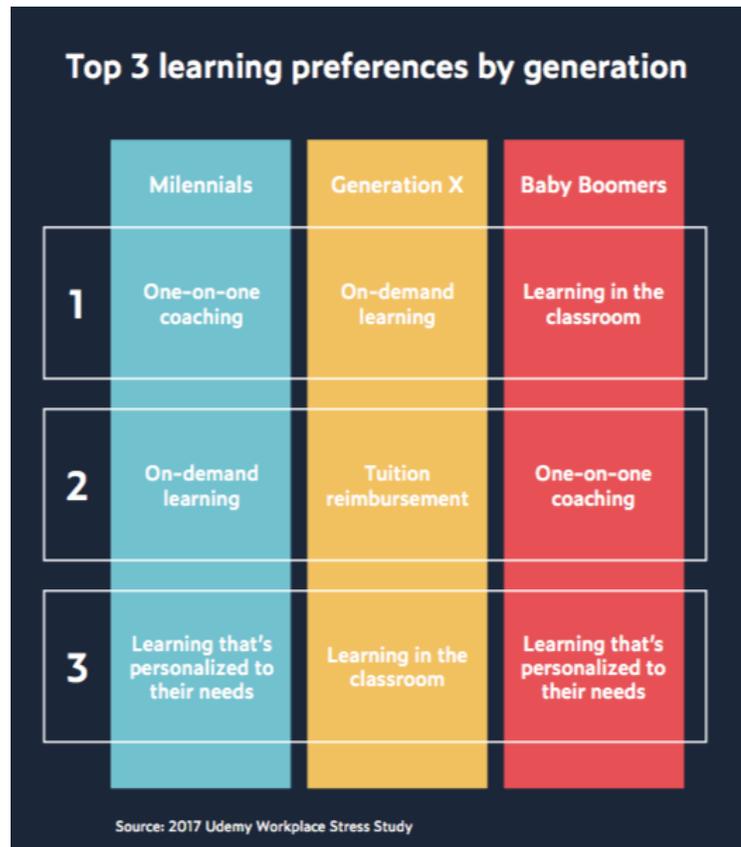
- *provide a personal experience – in that they are selected by the individual concerned in terms of what, how and when he/she needs – rather than being a one-size-fits-all experience, designed by someone else (usually L&D).*
- *are self-organised and self-managed– individuals make their own decisions about how to address their learning and performance problems in order to self-improve and self-develop.*
- *are an integral part of the daily work*

from [How modern professionals prefer to learn](#)

[5 Workplace Learning Trends and 5 Predictions for 2018](#) from the 2018 Learning Index Report by [Udemy for Business](#), states that learning trends for 2018 are:

1. *The power of algorithms predicts what people want to learn next*
In today’s constantly evolving world, careers don’t follow predictable paths and new types of jobs arise every year. Employees come to organizations with different skill-sets and skill gaps. Powerful new algorithms can help individual employees navigate their own personal learning journeys.

2. *Mobile gets bigger as employees want to learn anywhere, anytime*
75% of smartphones users globally watch online videos on their phones.
3. *Four generations in the workplace requires a multidimensional approach to learning.*



AlphaPlus Field Research

What We Did

AlphaPlus signed up for LinkedIn Learning and reviewed a selection of courses. We started by looking at topics AlphaPlus staff are often called upon to address in the course of coaching engagements to see if there was material relevant to the people

we work with most often. We also tested the algorithm to see if the recommendations would create meaningful pathways for LBS professionals.

In this phase of our field research, we found courses that we thought would be relevant to a broad spectrum of people working in LBS, but we felt that we did not have enough information about how people in the field are currently engaging in self-directed professional development to ascertain whether or not they find the platform a good place to learn. If LBS professionals are learning at work in the ways described in the workplace learning research, the platform could work very well. On the other hand, if they were approaching learning at work in different ways, they may find the platform less than ideal.

We decided we needed to learn more about how LBS practitioners are learning at work to get a sense of how the models described above reflect the experience of LBS professionals and to determine if an online, independent, self-directed, algorithmic learning platform would work for this cohort.

In order to determine how LinkedIn Learning would fit into the professional development framework for LBS managers and instructors, we needed to find out the answers to these questions:

- How do LBS professionals manage workplace learning?
- What are their preferences?
- How will algorithms support or not support their learning pathways?

We felt that the best way to do this was to ask a group of practitioners about their current professional learning framework, have them experiment with LinkedIn Learning and report on their experience.

We decided that, for the scope of this report, we could work with 10 English-speaking participants from community-based programs.

We put out a call (*Appendix A: Outreach Letter*) and 10 people responded. The participants work in programs in a variety of regions in small urban centres. Three people work mainly as instructors, three mainly as program managers and the other four do both.

We did a survey interview (*Appendices B, C and D*) with each participant. The survey did not include finding out about how people learn in courses, workshops and conferences where people learn together in a group. This survey was conducted to find out about what self-directed, self-determined and self-motivated workplace learning literacy workers are doing now (*Appendix J*).

The survey asked literacy workers about:

- How they currently engage in self-determined, informal professional development.
- How they would like to engage in online self-determined, informal professional development.
- How they decide when they need to learn something new.
- How they decide what resource to use.

- How they determine the effectiveness of the resource.
- What they do next.

We also asked people about their wish list — what resources they would like to see created or would like to have access to. The wish list can be seen in the companion document *AlphaPlus LinkedIn Learning Report Field Research* under the heading “Learning 5: The Professional Development (PD) Wish List.”

AlphaPlus collected this information in order to think about how LinkedIn Learning fits into the collective current framework and could enhance and extend the learning literacy workers are already doing. AlphaPlus also wanted to learn about what types of learning people are looking for and what criteria they use to rate a learning opportunity.

The answers to the questions about the criteria for evaluating an online learning experience as effective and engaging were used to create a rubric for evaluating the LinkedIn Learning experience (*Appendix H*). We created an evaluation form for the platform to determine ease-of-use and whether the LinkedIn Learning recommendations create useful and effective learning pathways (*Appendix I*).

The next step was for participants to choose a LinkedIn Learning course and evaluate it in terms of how it fit into their own professional development framework, how it works as a professional development resource for Ontario LBS programs and whether they feel learning pathways determined by algorithms are relevant to the work and learning needs of LBS practitioners (*Appendices G, H and I*).

All participants submitted their evaluations in a timely manner and all the responses were comprehensive and thoughtful. Our plan for the follow-up interviews was to ask participants to expand on the evaluations but as they had written up the answers so fully, we focused on the questions about how they felt LinkedIn Learning could complement the learning LBS practitioners are already doing and their recommendations for the field (*Appendix K*).

The final step in our field research was to invite the project participants to a video conference. We wanted the participants to meet each other and we wanted them to reflect on the things we had learned from the interviews and evaluations. I presented the research results (*Appendix L*) and asked people for their comments and if they wanted to add anything. I added the new ideas and information to the Field Research document called *AlphaPlus LinkedIn Learning Report - Field Research*.

What We Learned

The people who participated in this project have had a lot of experience with professional learning and value professional development for themselves and for their colleagues,

I am a professional development enthusiast – I take anything that is going.

Participants who supervise staff spoke about the need for professional development for the health of the program,

In our job descriptions – no one person can do it all when they come in but hopefully, they know it all by the time they leave.

I would love for people to be cross trained in some of the executive director responsibilities. This would help in succession planning as well – for when I leave or even if I need to take time off.

and the personal and professional fulfillment of the people who work there,

We have professional development and compensation – community-based programs cannot do as well in compensation as school boards and colleges – there is no promotion available but professional development can help people grow and feel fulfilled at work.

We want to pay for people to get training in things the organization needs them to do but also in the things that are of interest to them.

People working in LBS programs learn at work for all the reasons that were described in the literature.

They learn for inspiration.

PD is not just for keeping up and for compliance but also about your interests – not just to do things in your current job description but also things you want to do in the future or to enhance your resume.

They learn to stay current and reflect the ways literacy learning is evolving.

If we do not include digital technology in our learning environments, we are not reflecting the real world. We used to be able to manage learning by being an avid reader but now we need to access the resources that are available online – if we don't, we will miss out on a lot.

They learn to become competent as instructors.

I always want to be able to improve my ability to help students. I always feel there is more to know.

and in leadership roles,

I manage staff, volunteer and the Board – people turn to me for answers. I need to know policies of the organization, funders and government. I have a leadership role to keep the organization working and keep people working well together.

They learn whether they are new to the field or have been working in literacy for a long time.

I don't always feel confident. I am new in the field and do not have as much experience as my colleagues. I want to learn to become a more effective teacher and to learn to better manage the administrative part of this job – as you know that has become a big part of being an LBS instructor.

I have been in field for 24 years. I am looking to change what I do.

They learn to become conformant or compliant.

I want to make sure I am doing the right thing and things are constantly changing.

And they learn to create a career path.

I do this to keep skills current. I like micro-credentialling to keep my resume current. I recommend this to all the staff and the learners.

I have also done [AOAD training](#) [Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act] and CPR and [Naloxone](#) training. This might not seem like LBS PD, but these are things that I need to know in my workplace and are transferable to other workplaces.

Note: More about the reasons LBS practitioners engage in workplace learning can be seen in the companion document *AlphaPlus LinkedIn Learning Report – Field Research* under the heading “Learning 1: Why project participants learn.”

Workplace learning that happens in Literacy and Basic Skills community-based programs happens mostly in these two ways described in the literature:

- from time to time – as and when needed; and
- continuously – daily or very regularly.

Opportunities for participating in educational events outside or at the workplace do happen but are less common. These opportunities are valued highly and rated as effective ways to learn from a facilitator with expertise and from each other.

When we get together there is a whole bunch of learning that happens in ad hoc conversations and networking as well as what happens in workshops.

People spoke about the constraints to participating in professional development that requires fees, travel and time away from their usual work. Program budgets do not have funds for the fees, the travel costs and the cost to replace staff so LBS practitioners are rarely able to participate in this type of workplace learning.

Budget constraints are the main barrier to professional development – not practitioner motivation. It is not just the cost of attending professional development opportunities, it is also the cost of replacing people at work and/or paying people for the time they spend on professional development.

As a learner centre our mandate should be professional development – we should walk the talk – but it is mostly time and cost prohibitive.

In some programs, most of the staff works part-time and this creates another barrier.

In the past everyone was full time. It is hard to ask part time staff to take time off their other work to do professional development.

Note: More about the ways LBS practitioners do workplace learning can be seen in the companion document *AlphaPlus LinkedIn Learning Report – Field Research* under the heading “Learning 2: How project participants learn.”

When we asked people about their criteria for a positive and effective learning experience, they reflected the literature in valuing a personal experience and learning that is self-organized and self-managed. Some people valued learning that is an integral part of the daily work while others felt that they needed quiet and uninterrupted time in order to be able to focus, reflect and practise.

Most people felt that learning is best when there is a variety of ways to experience new ideas and to communicate about what they were learning. They also valued facilitators who showed a high level of expertise, prompt and relevant feedback and for some, a certificate.

Note: The criteria LBS practitioners have for workplace learning can be seen in the companion document *AlphaPlus LinkedIn Learning Report – Field Research* under the heading “Learning 3: Criteria for good learning” and in *Appendix H*.

Most people found that the LinkedIn Learning course (or courses) they took met enough of the criteria to make the experience engaging and worth the time and energy. Many were very positive about the experience.

I liked the material and how it was presented – I did not want to fall asleep or think, “When will this be over.” It takes a lot to impress me. I often think, “I knew all of that.” But not with LinkedIn Learning.

People found that everything worked well.

Everything works so well! There is no waiting for videos to load and watching that little circle going around and around. All the handouts and downloads worked perfectly.

Note: More about what LBS practitioners thought about the LinkedIn Learning courses they took can be seen in the companion document *AlphaPlus LinkedIn Learning Report – Course Evaluations*.

We asked people to evaluate the platform as well as the courses to see how well the LinkedIn Learning algorithms can help individual LBS program workers navigate their own personal learning journeys or if they would need to have an LBS specific pathway created to help them choose the courses. Some people found the recommendations helpful.

The recommendations were accurate and helpful. Yes, I really like the idea of building my own learning pathways.

But most felt an LBS pathway would be helpful.

I think it would be very helpful to have LBS specific learning pathways. It would filter out a lot of the tangential stuff. I like to think I’m pretty smart, but I felt like I was struggling a bit to find the stuff I wanted.

There were lots of pathways I thought could help me and my staff in specific areas of our fields, both as individual workers, but also with transferability to things we could use/share with our students.

Note: More LBS practitioner recommendations and their thoughts about an LBS pathway can be seen in the companion document *AlphaPlus LinkedIn Learning Report – Field Research* under the heading “Learning 11: The LinkedIn Learning algorithm.”

Some people found that they could do the course at their workplace while others found that the courses required a level of concentration that they could only achieve in a quieter place,

I did a lot at home because there are too many interruptions at work.

Some managers worried that this would make LinkedIn Learning difficult to integrate into the workday.

It can be hard to sequester yourself at work – even 15 minutes can be a challenge sometimes. We could do the courses during our lunch hour, but we have to be careful about making sure we have a sustainable work/life balance.

When asked if there were enough courses that were relevant to LBS practitioners, we heard that there was for some people.

There is enough that intertwines and it is also a great place to get ideas for curriculum.

But others, especially those who work mostly as instructors, felt that courses created for Ontario LBS practitioners would be helpful.

It would be great if there were courses that included lesson prep for adult literacy, information about how to use the OALCF, how to create differentiated or individualized learning opportunities and how to work with people who are working at a grade 7, 8, 9, academic level but are adults. It is easy for someone with experience to adapt the ideas to the

adult literacy context, but this may be more difficult for someone new to the field, especially if they were coming from the K-12 system.

Some people saw the potential for using the courses, or what they learned in the courses, with learners.

It is going to be so good for our learners. When they take courses in school, they are weeks long. LinkedIn Learning will give learners experience learning online in shorter courses. We can start them in one-hour courses and then move them to longer courses as they get experience. Plus, the courses prepare them for employment and daily life in terms of content. I saw many matches for learners in our program.

Others saw the value of using the courses with staff teams.

I think this is a useful group tool as well as a good resource for individuals. We can watch a video together at work and discuss the content.

I liked the transcripts. I copied parts and shared with other staff when we were preparing for a discussion at a staff meeting.

and making professional connections with a wider network,

I got a response from a colleague who saw I was taking a course through my LinkedIn profile. It gets people talking about what and how they are learning.

Some people appreciated the access to expertise.

The content is solid. I felt as though I was listening to an expert. I watch videos on YouTube when I want to learn something but the content there is not always a good standard. In the LinkedIn Learning course I really felt as though I was getting somewhere.

And some appreciated access to a wider perspective.

I liked that this was not specific to LBS. The ministry funds training that is specific to LBS and that is most of what I attend these days, but I feel that I am missing the wider picture. I want to learn about more general topics that are related to my work and to have access to what people are doing in other jurisdictions. We no longer learn about what is happening in adult education internationally.

Professional development does not have to be so intrinsically linked to how-to-teach or the class we are teaching to be relevant – it keeps our brains open, develops breadth and is especially helpful for developing individualized curricula.

Most people expressed that they felt LinkedIn Learning connected them to “something bigger.”

We are used to scrimping and saving in LBS – we are used to making do. This feels like it is part of something bigger and not the usual make-do opportunity.

Note: More about how LBS practitioners thought LinkedIn Learning would work for people in community-based LBS programs can be seen in the companion document *AlphaPlus LinkedIn Learning Report – Field Research* under the headings “Learning 8: Benefits for LBS practitioners,” “Learning 9: Challenges for LBS practitioners” and “Learning 10: LinkedIn Learning for LBS learners.”

Many of the participants were positive about LinkedIn Learning as a professional learning tool, but felt that funding for LinkedIn Learning should not come at the cost of other resources,

This should not be funded at the cost of operating funds – only as an add on.

They felt that funding for LinkedIn Learning should include funding for an LBS channel.

If we ask the ministry to add LBS access to LinkedIn Learning across school board and community-based programs as well as colleges, we should include the development of LBS content by Ontario experts.

Add a focus on adult learning – perhaps use the teachers from the adult literacy certificate program to create courses.

Create professional development each year for practitioners – perhaps required – on policies and procedures (for example, confidentiality of learner records and privacy), directions and priorities so that we are all told the same things and we are all on the same page.

One participant suggested that a support organization be given administration of a set of licences that would be available on a rotating basis to practitioners on school board and community-based programs.

It would be great for a support organization to take it up – to buy 300 licences and people can sign up and use it for a month at a time.

And another cautioned that, because online learning can be tracked, practitioners might feel that learning on the platform was mandatory. She felt that this might be mitigated if a support organization was the administrator of the licences.

I am concerned that access might include tracking and that this could become more ‘thou shalt’ than ‘you can’. I think that it would be better coming through AlphaPlus – it would ensure a more ‘you can’ than a ‘thou shalt’ approach.

Note: More recommendations LBS practitioners had for using LinkedIn Learning in LBS community-based programs can be seen in the companion document *AlphaPlus LinkedIn Learning Report – Field Research* under the headings “Learning 12: Recommendations for LinkedIn Learning,” “Learning 13: Recommendations for the funder” and “Learning 14: Recommendations for AlphaPlus.”

What We Concluded

The advantages of engaging in professional development extend beyond the individuals who participate in the learning event. Practitioners are inspired by learning something new and mobilize the knowledge and skills they acquire to the benefit of their colleagues and the learners in the programs where they work. Learners sustain motivation in an environment that models lifelong learning by all the people who work and learn there and fosters a culture of curiosity, exploration and experimentation.

We saw a deep commitment to lifelong learning and professional development. Ontario LBS practitioners value self-managed and self-organized access to just-in-time learning in order to solve problems, refresh skills and knowledge or complete a task. They also value learning about new concepts and practices – learning that extends and enhances their practice in deeper ways. For this type of learning, they need time to reflect on what they are learning and experiment with the new ideas. Part of that process of reflection and experimentation includes opportunities to discuss with colleagues and peers what they are learning and how it is changing their ideas about practice.

The practitioners who participated in this project did most of their professional learning at work. They reported that this works well for just-in-time learning but it is difficult to find the time and space for reflection and experimentation in a busy workplace. Even when time has been allotted for learning, if that learning happens in the workplace people often dip out to answer emails and phone calls because they are concerned about tasks

building up while they are away from their desks. Once the learning event is over, there is not often time built in for the necessary reflective practice process.

Program coordinators expressed concerns about the ways that workplace learning and professional development add to the workload and create an unsustainable work/life balance if not managed properly. They see many staff learning on lunch breaks and on unpaid time. One person reported that she can learn at home on paid time which means that she could learn in a place away from the distractions of work without increasing her workload. Most people viewed this as a promising practice but noted that it does not solve the problem of work building up for some staff.

The other barrier to professional development is funds for fees, travel and replacement staff. In most programs the budget for learning is small and this means that practitioners are not able to consistently participate in the learning events that would benefit them and the program. Program coordinators expressed concern that they were not able to offer opportunities for professional growth; managers are concerned that they are not able to stay aware of industry trends for planning and leadership or keep current with funder and legal requirements; and instructors are concerned that they are not able to explore new ideas about adult education and implementing adult learning principles.

The LBS practitioners who participated in this project told us that professional learning in LBS is most effective when:

- Practitioners have access to a wide variety of learning opportunities for educators who want to change what they are doing; meet the evolving needs of learners, tutors and staff; or connect to a broader education and not-for-profit network in Canada and globally.
- Practitioners have access to expertise from people working in the broader adult education and not-for-profit fields as well as within the Ontario LBS community of practice.
- Practitioners make their own decisions about what and how to learn and how to mobilize new knowledge and skills.

- Professional learning opportunities accommodate and advance the diverse ways people want to access and express learning.
- Learning about concepts and ideas includes time for reflection, discussion and experimentation.
- Learning opportunities include time for synchronous networking and ad hoc conversations where people can make connections and learn from each other.
- Practitioners engaged in independent workplace learning have access to peer-facilitated learning circles where they can connect to people taking the same courses for knowledge translation and exchange.

We conclude that there are six ways to strengthen professional learning in LBS.

1. Support practitioners in developing and sustaining personal learning networks that include colleagues from Ontario as well as practitioners in other jurisdictions.
2. Create ways for practitioners to share resources for just-in-time learning. Each practitioner curates their own list of resources and evaluates each item for currency, accuracy and authority and we need to find better ways to share this knowledge so that the work is not being replicated in each program.
3. Create learning pathways for people new to the field. People new to the field, those who came to literacy from another field and those who support new staff all expressed concern about the challenge of finding places to learn about adult literacy in general and the specifics of the Ontario LBS program.
4. Create learning pathways for those taking on coordination, management and other leadership roles. People are looking for clear guidelines and up-to-date training about what they need to know to remain compliant with funder requirements, legislation pertaining to not-for-profits and financial governance as well as more the more general leadership skills they need to support staff, boards and volunteers.

5. Make sure that programs have funding to pay for both training and staff time to participate in training where participants have time to learn, reflect, experiment and evaluate in order to apply new knowledge and skills to their practice. This may include paying for time at work to learn and to pay replacement staff so that people can take time away from their daily tasks to learn without returning to an increased workload.
6. Create a system-wide, asset-building professional development plan that puts practitioners at the centre of decision-making, accommodates the diverse needs and goals of those working in the field, and acknowledges that learning takes time for the event and for the experimentation, reflection and evaluation essential to mobilizing knowledge and changing practice. Programs face similar issues when implementing a professional development plan. While effective partnerships exist, in most cases, each organization is working on this issue alone. A system-wide approach should provide consistent, coherent and sustainable access to essential learning for the LBS workplace and professional growth opportunities that are self-managed and self-organized.

We started by exploring what role LinkedIn Learning and self-directed, algorithm-based e-learning platforms could play in LBS professional development. The project participants reported that LinkedIn Learning was an effective, engaging and accessible way to enrich their professional knowledge.

Our exploration of a particular platform led us to a wider look at how LBS practitioners engage in professional learning, what makes it effective, and what they would like to see in the future. AlphaPlus hopes that this report will provide a guide to strengthening professional learning so that LBS practitioners can meet

their own learning and career goals, enhance their practice, and contribute to the advancement of the adult literacy field.