Recognition For Learning
Module II: Identifying your Learning

Acknowledgement (*slide 1*)

CAPLA and Recognition for Learning acknowledge Saskatchewan Learning and their "Journey of Self-Discovery: Facilitator's Guide to Reflection and Portfolio Development" 2005 for granting use of their materials for this module.

> *"Learning is the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience"*
>
> (Experiential Learning, David Kolb, 1984).

What is PLAR? (*slide 2*)

In 'Module 1: Introduction to PLAR', you learned that PLAR is a systematic process through which you reflect on, identify, self-assess, organize, describe and document your knowledge, skills and attitudes that you have acquired over your lifetime. Your learning may have come

- through formal education
- through workplace training, and
- informally, through volunteer work, military work, travel, and numerous other significant life experiences.

You may need to identify specific areas of your knowledge, skills and attitudes for the purposes of understanding your strengths, gaining employment, career advancement, or educational credit. Once you have identified and documented your learning in the form of knowledge, skills and attitudes, you will need to prove your learning to an assessor in order for it to be recognized.

This module will help you start to think about your own learning, to help you reflect on your experiences and training, and to draw the learning from them.

> *Remember, PLAR is about the learning you have gained from experience, not just experience.*

The process of reflection (*slide 3*)

If you think about your past experiences, and start to identify what you learned from these experiences, you will begin to see connections between various environments you have been in such as school, community activities and work. You will start to see how learning from one environment or situation can be transferred and applied to another situation. You are looking to identify how your knowledge, skills and attitudes can be applied in various situations.

Reflection involves four main steps:

1) Having an experience
2) Thinking about the experience
3) Identifying learning from the experience, and
4) Applying what has been learned

Through reflection, you are able to increase your own awareness of your knowledge and skills, and to be better able to state or demonstrate that learning. You can then collect or create concrete samples (evidence) of your learning so that it may be assessed for a specific purpose.

You may participate in a workshop or group discussions about identifying your learning, and have peers help you think about your learning. Possibly you could participate in portfolio development workshops, but the ultimate responsibility to identify, articulate and prove your learning is yours.

Remember, each individual is unique, and therefore your learning will be unique. It is up to you to be able to identify and prove your unique skills and abilities.

Identifying Learning for what? (*slide 4*)

You may wish to prove specific learning for a job you are applying for, to gain credit for a course you don't think you need to take because you have the learning, or to look towards a new career direction or job promotion.

Whatever the specific goal of proving your learning may be, it often helps to start with reflecting on your learning to identify your overall knowledge, skills and attitudes. Then you can begin to see how these relate to your specific goals.

Reflecting on your past training (workshops, workplace training or self-directed learning), or volunteer, family or community activities is not an easy task; it takes time and effort; but the rewards can be extensive.

As an adult, you are constantly learning. You learn from reading, from using new equipment, from being forced into caregiver or family situations, from community involvement, from sports, and from reading or 'doing'. You need to look at your life experiences in a new way; look at 'challenges' and activities to see what you learned from each.

As you proceed through the reflection process, and identify knowledge and skills, you may also start to think about possible evidence to prove this learning. You may want to consider collecting evidence as you go along (samples of your work, verification of skills letters from others, or narrative about your learning), and then you can pick specific evidence samples later for the purpose of PLAR.

Just a thought: it is interesting that many people who take the time to reflect on their learning in life, and to identify their skills and abilities find that they may change the direction of their life or career because they now recognize additional strengths, interests or skills than they thought they had.

Identifying and thinking about your key experiences (*slide 5*)

The usual question from people when they think about reflecting on their experiences and related learning is "Where do I start?" Sometimes it is simply a good idea to start to think back on your life, and to write down ideas in different categories. The following provide a few different optional approaches you might use to start the process.

a) Make an experiential learning inventory. (sample)
b) Develop a chronological record of major experiences. (sample)
c) Develop a 'Lifeline' of trends and patterns in your life.
   (sample1, sample2)
d) Develop a listing of your informal and on-the-job training activities. (sample)
e) Identify your daily activities (sample)

By starting with any of the above activities, it will help you to reflect on how and what you have learned. Once you have started to identify learning, the next step is to be able to clearly identify your knowledge, skills and attitudes.

Specifying your Knowledge, Skills and Attitudes (KSAs) (*slide 6*)

Once you have identified some of your past experiences, work activities and training, you can now start to identify the knowledge, skills and attitudes that you have learned from these experiences. This process involves digging deeper into these activities. The following questions may be helpful to identify your Knowledge, Skills and Attitudes (KSAs).

Knowledge: (what a person knows).

- What did I need to know to complete the task?
- What information did I use to make decisions or set priorities?
- What information did I have when I started the task or activity and what new information did I gain?

Skills and abilities: (what a person can do)

- What did I do to complete the task?
- What tools, programs or methods did I use?
- How did I use these tools, programs or methods?
- What steps did I take to decide what to do?

Attitudes: (the values and principles reflected in a person's behaviour)

- What is important to me while completing the task?
- What principles, morals or beliefs guide my decisions and actions?
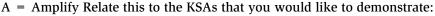- What are my values regarding life, work, school etc?

- What qualities or character traits did I show in my work? (eg enthusiastic, reliable, responsible, respectful etc)

SAFeWay: a guide for Reflections (*slide 7*)

One process for identifying significant events and reflect on the learning from these events is found in the SAFeWay process which helps to tell a story in a structured way.

S = Statement Provide a description of an event, or issue.
- What happened?
- Where and when did it happen?
- Who was there and what did they do?
- Why is this important?

A = Amplify Relate this to the KSAs that you would like to demonstrate:
- What makes this event important?
- Why is this a good example of your learning?
- What tasks/jobs enabled you to develop the KSAs?

W = Wrap up Tell how the information you have provided supports the statement that you opened with. This closes the summary very neatly and ties the end to the beginning.
- Link the closing remark to the initial statement

Digging Deeper for KSAs (*slide 8*)

Sometimes the process of reflection forces us to back up and to look further and deeper into our initial listings. An individual was exploring her Knowledge, Skills and Attitudes developed through her volunteer work as a Big Sister. After identifying the major activities one completed as a Big Sister, a peer group she was working with helped her to dig deeper and identify more specific learning and achievements.

For example, one activity that was identified was "Coordinate people matches for big brothers and big sisters".

Process they went through to refine the listing to be able to state:

1) Reflecting on the Knowledge (K) required for this job included:
Knowing what constitutes effective matches, and what the protocols are for matching. The coordinator also needs to be familiar with the candidate and volunteers profiles (their characteristics, needs and interests). Knowledge of mediation techniques is also required.

2) Reflecting on the Skills (S) required for this job included:
Being able to listen, interview candidates, organize group events, manage time, set priorities, communicate effectively and delegate to other volunteers.

3) Reflecting on Attitudes (A) required for this job included: Being respectful, empathetic, and outgoing, as well as a mediator and team player.

- Created profiles of youth through individual interviews to effectively match candidates with volunteer Big Brothers and Big Sisters according to the organizations' protocols
- Organized group activities to support candidates awaiting matches with volunteer Big Brother or Big Sister

This added detail can benefit you as a job seeker, as the employer will have a better idea of the complete skill set. For example, many potential employers may not know what 'coordinate people matches for Big Brother or Big Sister' entails.

A more informative entry on a résumé can provide a better idea of the overall ability and level of ability you have.

Stating your learning (*slide 9*)

When you are listing your Knowledge, Skills and Attitudes (also known as competencies), it is important to state them in a specific manner.

Read the following examples:

- I can create profiles of youth through individual interviews to effectively match candidates with volunteer Big Brothers and Big Sisters according to the organizations' protocols (Skill)
- Outline the general steps involved in dealing with customer complaints in a positive manner (Knowledge), and
- Communicate with customers to establish rapport and create a warm and inviting environment on a regular basis (Skill).

Note that in each of these examples, there is included:

- HOW: A verb (create, match, outline, communicate)
- WHAT: a 'product' (youth profiles, general steps of dealing with customer complaints, establish rapport)
- WHAT FORM: the context (according to the organization's protocols, in a positive manner, on a regular basis).

Setting your learning into context (*slide 10*)

The previous pages will help you start to reflect on your learning, and to identify your key knowledge and skills. The next steps you may need to consider are:

1) group or summarize your knowledge, skills and attitudes into core statements and details;
   relate your knowledge, skills and attitudes to those required in
2) the course you are challenging, the job you are seeking, or other goals you are moving towards;
3) discover what is required in the way of proving your learning for your purpose (refer back to forms and method of PLAR in Module 1)
4) identify and document evidence or proof of your learning (if required), to challenge a course, prepare for an interview, or develop a portfolio.

You may wish to move on to review the Module on "Introduction to Portfolios" to see how you might document your Knowledge, Skills and Attitudes through the portfolio process.

Additional Resources for identifying your learning (*slide 11*)

There are many additional skills identification tools available, including:

- Blueprint for Life/Work Design, at
  http://www.blueprint4life.ca

- Identifying Essential Skills, at
  http://www15.hrdc-drhc.gc.ca/english/general/es.asp

- Career Planning: Choosing an Occupation, at
  http://www.alis.gov.ab.ca/pdf/cshop/CareerPlanner.pdf

- Self assessment activities at
  http://wtcareer.wtamu.edu/cs/student/self-assessment.htm