



Connect activities to your learners' interests and needs. Be sure materials are authentic and relate to their lives.



If you can catch a learner's eye in that moment when they got a concept bang-on, nothing will ever be the same again. When your eyes meet, there is no going back. They have been seen being brilliant.



Start where your learners are at. Use their strengths, background and goals as a springboard to teaching foundational skills.



Provide learners meaningful practice opportunities to apply new skills in the classroom and in their lives.



Take time to get to know your learners. With relationship comes trust and a more relaxed learning environment.

Wisdom From the Field

If you had a colleague delivering an adult foundational learning program for the first time, what words of wisdom would you share?

That’s the question Calgary Learns asked our members early in 2019. We received more than 50 tips from ten organizations*, and we thank them for generously sharing their wisdom.

These tips are both practical and philosophical. They are proof-positive that the practitioners we work with are perfectly positioned to understand the changing needs of learners, the complexity of the challenges they face, and the powerful potential of relevant learning opportunities.

We share this **Wisdom From the Field** with you in honour of adult foundational learners and practitioners everywhere. May you find it both interesting and useful.

Teaching reading is fundamental

It used to be that our work was called “adult literacy.” Although every effective program has always involved more than working only with reading and writing, it’s now acknowledged that the work we do is centred on a broader set of foundational skills. Those skills include reading, but are not limited to it.

Nevertheless, being able to read well is absolutely fundamental. Limited reading skills are obstacles in the way of achieving learning and life goals. Good reading instruction paves the way to learner success. Many other skills—comprehension, problem-solving, decision-making, personal reflection, self-efficacy and empathy, to name but a few—are all part of reading.

As you teach your learners the reading skills they need, **Wisdom From the Field** reminds you:

- Learning to read is never a short-term mission. It is a journey.
- No matter how difficult and painful it is at the beginning, reading and learning to read can become interesting and joyful.
- It requires practice and persistence from the learner, and even more so from the instructor.
- Helping someone learn to read can be the most rewarding part of our work. It opens the door to all further learning, and truly changes lives.

Relationships trump content

When you take the time to build relationships with your learners, you generate the trust and confidence that lead to a relaxed and supportive learning environment. And in that kind of environment, learners thrive.

In fact, building caring relationships with your learners is the first and most powerful strategy for successfully facilitating adult foundational learning.

As you get to know your learners, **Wisdom From the Field** reminds you:

- We are more alike than we are different. Meet your learners as equals.
- Be approachable, friendly, and welcoming.
- Be genuine. You are a learner too, and this can give your learners hope. You too have probably had trouble with learning at some point. You can share stories of times when you felt challenged but stuck with it, and of what a difference that made to your life.
- Getting to know your learners will help you understand what they want to learn and how best to help them learn it.
- It’s also important to build relationships with your colleagues. Working together and learning from each other will help you offer your learners the best possible opportunities for success.

Instructors create the space for learning

As an instructor, you create the physical learning space, and you also create the emotional feel of the space.

It matters how you greet and work with learners, how you model respect and compassion, how you encourage learning.

It matters that you love what you do. From that passion comes curiosity, which includes ongoing growth and development. Your excitement will spread to your learners.

And it matters that you know why you love what you do. There will always be days when loving your work may not be quite enough. On those days, knowing why you do the work you do will help carry you through.

As you consciously create the learning space, **Wisdom From the Field** reminds you:

- It is so important to listen—really listen with empathy—to your learners. Reference what they say to show you were listening.
- Be positive and reassuring. Learners consistently report that encouragement is what keeps them coming even when they think they can’t.
- Be patient. Understand that it’s difficult for some learners to even get to class, never mind take in information.
- Repeat and review. Learning one tiny skill thoroughly is more useful and rewarding than half-learning a multitude of skills.
- Remember that both instructors and learners bring wisdom. Expect that you will learn as much from your learners as they learn from you.

Help learners discover their own brilliance. If you can catch their eyes in that moment when they got a concept bang-on, nothing will ever be the same again. There is no going back. They have been seen being brilliant.

Have high expectations of yourself as instructor

Underlying all these tips from the field is the simple truth that how you teach is as important as what you teach.

Always remember that you’re a learner too. Look for professional development opportunities. If you stop growing as a professional, your learners will stop learning.

As you work with your learners, **Wisdom From the Field** reminds you:

- Meet your learners where they’re at—literally, educationally and emotionally. Offer learning opportunities in places that are convenient for them. Be aware of who they are as people, how they learn. Make sure you understand what being in a classroom or tutoring situation is like for them.
- Connect learning to the learners’ needs. Follow their lead. Use their strengths, interests and background to teach foundational skills. Help them establish realistic goals that they can meet successfully.
- Model and demonstrate the new learning in action, and provide learners with the opportunity to practice and review.
- Make learning safe, and accept mistakes as part of it. Create the space to ask questions.
- Avoid assumptions about “common knowledge.” All knowledge is highly contextual and culturally informed.
- Challenge yourself to update your lessons and activities on a regular basis. Keep it interesting. Be creative. Plan for fun!

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