

Preparations and Plans for post-COVID Programming

ABC Life Literacy Canada 2022 Innovation Learning Lab: Session 2
June 23, 2022

Session overview

Over the past two years, practitioners have seen many changes with COVID safety restrictions that have affected planning and the learning environment. In this moderated discussion, our panelists, who are all literacy practitioners, discussed how we can move forward with program planning in the post-COVID era. With changing restrictions an ongoing possibility, we discussed how practitioners can continue to provide programming for learners in a variety of situations.

We asked each panelist to describe what their programs looked like before and during COVID, and what they look like now and how they think programs will change going forward. We also asked the panelists three questions throughout the webinar:

- Have you experienced any trial and error with your approach to programming over the last few years?
- Many learners are continuing to experience the physical, socio-economic, and mental tolls that arose as a result of COVID. What are some of your organization's holistic approaches to help support your learners during this transitional period?
- What kind of supports are needed to re-engage learners and restore a sense of community, belonging, and learning? Looking ahead, what are some critical changes we must make now to face the future of literacy effectively?

Panelists

- Christine Bossi from Victoria Literacy Connection in British Columbia.
- Jan Goatcher from the John Howard Society of Ottawa in Ontario. This organization received an honourable mention from the *Canada Life Literacy Innovation Awards* in 2020 for their 'Skills Plus' program.
- Cloyce Weaver from Youth Empowering Parents (YEP) in Ontario. This organization was the Top Winner for the 2014 *Canada Life Literacy Innovation Award* for their program entitled 'Youth Empowering Parents.'

Key findings

Throughout the webinar, there was an emphasis on the future of programming following a hybrid model. In this case a hybrid model looked different for each organization and program, however, in general its offering is both in-person and online options. Each panelist stated that their programs will be continuing with their own hybrid model as it is what is working best for learners. As Cloyce Weaver pointed out, there is no going back to old ways of programming and teaching. This may look different for every organization, but hybrid models are giving learners options to learn in the ways they find comfortable and effective. A significant note of hybrid

learning that was discussed is the ability to reach those who were previously unreachable or hard to reach.

Another key point discussed by panelists was digital literacy. Many have found that there were learners hesitant to move to online learning due to their digital literacy skill levels. There is also a continuing issue with access to the internet, which has seen the gap in digital literacy skills and access to programming widen during the pandemic. However, by focusing on support for digital literacy, practitioners have been able to engage these learners in both digital literacy skills and more once they're comfortable online. They've also been able to help learners get online with device loaning programs and public internet initiatives.

Practitioners also pointed out that adaptability and flexibility were key in their transition to online learning, as well as their approach to hybrid learning. Especially at the beginning of the pandemic when learners and practitioners alike had a difficult time getting comfortable with all virtual formats for learning. As Cloyce stated "creating community in a Zoom environment is tricky". Many have found it difficult to engage learners the same way virtually as they used to in-person, however, there are ways to improve engagement. Some suggestions included, keeping groups small, using breakout rooms and posing questions that are of interest to learners.

Each guest speaker also shared the ways in which they supported learners beyond learning during the transition to virtual learning. The John Howard Society made sure to focus on mental health as they work with justice-involved learners who often face criminal records, inconsistent housing, etc. They also made sure to continue their focus on food provision, as it was a key component they brought to the community prior to the pandemic. At YEP, they began to include breathing exercises in their Zoom classes, and increased breakout sessions with personal sharing activities. Organizations also gave out computers to learners who were facing socio economic challenges so that they could still participate and connect with others. Finally, Victoria Literacy Connection was able to secure grants that allowed the organization to provide learners with laptops and tablets. They've also been advocating for infrastructure improvement to bring accessible and affordable Wifi to learning across British Columbia.

Following the moderated discussion, the guest speakers received significant engagement and questions from attendees. The main question and point that came forward was the importance of digital literacy and the gap that currently exists with educational focuses on digital literacy and relevant supports and programs. Throughout the discussion there was also engagement from attendees in the chat, including asking for and sharing different resources, tips and best practices. Resources were shared during and after the webinar, and the post-webinar email to all registrants including resources related to all levels of digital literacy, best practices for learning and facilitating virtually and more.

This year we're hosting four Innovation Learning Labs, thanks to the support of Canada Life through the *Canada Life Literacy Innovation Award*. In each webinar we will discuss one topic that is important and relevant to the literacy field in 2022. [Watch recorded Labs and read summaries.](#)