

LNRA

Learning Needs & Resources Assessment

Respect is not a well-developed concept in psychology... its importance to human beings is irrefutable... Unless learners know they can express their true selves without fear of threat or humiliation, they will not be forthcoming with their perceptions of their own reality.

–Raymond J. Wlodkowski (1999)

As the title indicates, this chapter describes and helps you plan your Learning Needs & Resources Assessment (LNRA). The purpose of the LNRA is to find out more about the learners, their context, and the situation you are designing for. It's critical in every learning event to begin with respect for the learners, and the LNRA helps you with that: respect begins with the recognition of the differences and similarities of, and a deep curiosity about, each uniquely-situated individual learner.

This chapter unfolds as follows:

- Introduction to the Learning Needs and Resources Assessment;
- What can happen when you don't do an LNRA (or do *too little* LNRA)
- An introduction to the ASO TRIANGLE (ASK, STUDY, OBSERVE), an LNRA tool
- ASK: Explanation and examples
- STUDY: Explanation and examples
- OBSERVE: Explanation and examples
- Examples of how the LNRA can change your design
- Plan and implement your LNRA
- The LNRA is done, now what?

The Learning Needs and Resources Assessment is a broad analysis that helps you check your assumptions about your learners and the learning

event you're planning, make decisions based upon the actual situation and people attending, and add detail to your initial thoughts as you create and refine the design. The LNRA helps you fill gaps (needs) and capitalize on strengths (resources).

A thorough LNRA increases the likelihood you will design a workshop that is:

- Relevant to the learners' experiences and lives;
- Engaging of the mind, body and heart;
- Immediately useful for the learners;
- Safe enough to be challenging; and
- Yes, respectful!

You actually began your LNRA the minute you started thinking about what you would teach to whom, and when and where you'd do the teaching. It's all too easy, however, to jump to your own conclusions about who you're teaching. It's very common to try to cover too much content, or the wrong content (more about this in Chapter 9), or to tell the learners about the content's usefulness without also creating opportunities for them to discover and personalize its value and importance for themselves. By conducting an LNRA you will learn more about how the learners will be applying their learning, as well as how to create an environment that will allow them to safely express themselves and discover for themselves why the content may be important for them.

It follows, then, that before you put too much time and commitment into a design, you will want to engage in an LNRA so you can add research-based detail as you are designing your learning event. This is particularly helpful during the first six steps of Design (WHO, WHY, SO THAT, WHEN, WHERE and WHAT). Putting your feet into the learners' shoes, and getting a good grasp of the situation that calls for this learning event, allows you to create a curriculum that is learning-centered and dialogue-based.

All this said, there may be times where gathering this information in advance of the learning event is difficult, perhaps due to timing, travel, language barriers, or being given "canned" curriculum to deliver "as is." In this latter situation, whatever you can do to honor these adults as decision-makers in their own lives and make the content more

engaging, relevant, and immediate to them will be greatly noticed and appreciated. For all these challenging situations, you need to put on your creative thinking hat, and the LNRA tools are at your disposal to apply as best you can, given the circumstances.

Finally, in this guide you will work through only the first of the four phases of an LNRA; the remaining phases are beyond the scope of this book. For more on the LNRA, browse through the free, downloadable resources at: <http://globallearningpartners.com/resources/downloadable-resources/>

Checking Assumptions (or, in other words, “What Can Happen When You Don’t Do An LNRA or Don’t Do Enough LNRA!”)

Here are some examples of common things that can happen when you don’t do an LNRA, or you don’t do enough with your LNRA.

- One educational design consultant asked many questions of the organization contact person, but never observed the staff in their offices or leading workshops. If she had, she would have found that their culture was very different from typical DE (Dialogue Education) teachers, and the materials and pace of any DE design would need to reflect these differences. The result: unhappy customers and neither teachers nor participants got what they hoped for in the training.
- In another project, one group designed 40 to 60 minute modules, when the people who would teach the modules only had 20-30 minutes available for teaching.
- A designer spent hours and hours creating an attractive, engaging design for new employees; it turned out that only two of the twenty-five employees were actually new to the company, and all the attendees already knew and had used what the designer had prepared.

What has happened to you?

A Simple and Effective Tool

The following tool from Global Learning Partners' foundational course, *Learning to Listen, Learning to Teach*, offers both strategies and a simple guide for accomplishing an LNRA. Take a look at the ASO (Ask-Study-Observe) TRIANGLE below. Review each of the three strategies you can employ in order to find out the information you need to create an engaging learning event.

ASO TRIANGLE



Although the following strategies are divided into the three dimensions, in reality you may do all three things simultaneously. For example, if you are doing a site visit it's likely you will ask questions, study documents, and observe the people and circumstances all in the same visit.



ASK

In the ASK dimension, you will need to decide *who* you will ask, *what* you will ask, and *how* will you ask it.

WHO TO ASK: Who can tell you about the situation, the learners, and what content is most important for this particular learning event? You want a range of opinions and insights, acknowledging that there are some decisions that will have been made for you and the learners. Here are a few people you might consider speaking to:

- Clients, former clients, family members
- Staff, supervisors, case counselors, department directors, lead trainers, the CEO, nurses, foremen...the list is infinite and depends, of course, on the field in which participants are working and the content you will be teaching.

WHAT TO ASK: What other questions would you add to the following list:

- Which content is most important? Why?
- What is missing?
- What could be omitted?
- What information will help you make choices about the content you'll be teaching?
- What are the expectations of the leadership, the learners, and the other stakeholders?
- What would make the greatest difference for this group of learners? Their lives? Their work? Their health?
- Who could be a resource to help you create relevant case studies or provide other types of examples to make the content real and engaging?
- For the more experienced people involved in the learning event, ask what challenges they have seen or experienced when they were first learning how to (or learning about) _____? What did and what would have helped their progress most?

HOW TO ASK: Consider how much time you have and how best to learn what is needed during that time by soliciting a range of views to give you the big picture. Even with very little time you can always take a sample that represents the full range of views. You can conduct surveys that ask a variety of questions (open, ranking, multiple choice) or conduct formal or informal interviews. Each of these methods can be completed face-to-face, by phone, e-mail, or mail.



STUDY

What might you study that will help you to narrow the content and create learning tasks that are as real and respectful as possible? How about:

- ONE** Internal organizational documents, reports, executive summaries, logs, communication pieces, etc.;
- TWO** The organization's website;

- THREE** Meta-analysis of pertinent issues or content;
- FOUR** Evaluation findings and needs assessments;
- FIVE** Similar curriculum; or
- SIX** Cutting edge research reports in the same field.

Which or what part of these documents might be a resource for your design, or a particular learning task? What else might you study?



OBSERVE

You are looking for whatever will help you select the right content and create meaningful learning tasks for the learners. This includes:

- Observing the culture, context, and circumstances in which the information and skills you will be teaching will be used;
- Looking for which attitudes could be barriers and which could be helpful;
- Determining what influences are present; and
- Deciding what appears to support change, and what seems to be a barrier to change.

You can observe the people who will be coming to your course, or people who are similar to those who will be coming. If you are teaching people who will then be applying their learning with a different group of clients, observe the clients if possible. Find out if there are videos or webinars you can watch.

Ask yourself: where else might I gather information by observing?

For as much as you are exploring *needs* by asking, observing and studying, you are also looking for resources: the things, people, and people's experiences that can be drawn upon, acknowledged and used to help move the learning along. For example, perhaps during an interview you noticed a person doing something that reflects an understanding of a concept you will be teaching. You can draw on that observation during the training without singling anyone out by crafting a learning task that takes advantage of a similar situation or skill. Or you could create a case study about that concept, or ask the person you observed to share his or her understanding with the group.

What follows are several examples of how LNRA data helped the designer select the vital – and omit extraneous – content and create learning tasks that helped ensure participants had the knowledge, skills and attitudes they needed to be effective back at work or at home. These examples are from an Alzheimer’s Disease curriculum for caretakers. In them you can see the original content that was chosen prior to the LNRA, which ASO strategy was used, what was discovered, and the change or changes that were made to the original content because of the new information.

What, if any, themes do you notice in the types of changes that occurred?

ORIGINAL CONTENT	ASO STRATEGY EMPLOYED	WHAT WE DISCOVERED	CHANGED CONTENT
Detailed descriptions of types of dementia	STUDIED Two books, and learning designs with feedback from past participants	There was too much content for the time available	Use just a general overview of the types of dementia

ORIGINAL CONTENT	ASO STRATEGY EMPLOYED	WHAT WE DISCOVERED	CHANGED CONTENT
Detailed descriptions of types of dementia	OBSERVED Actual sessions in progress	There was little time for questions, and frequently the agenda topics were not completed; very few people were diagnosed with anything other than Alzheimer’s Disease.	Ask workshop participants what their dementia diagnosis was; keep the focus on Alzheimer’s and provide general information regarding another type of dementia only if someone

ORIGINAL CONTENT	ASO STRATEGY EMPLOYED	WHAT WE DISCOVERED	CHANGED CONTENT
A video of the connections between the brain and behavior	ASKED Actual facilitators were asked about their experience with this video	The video was boring, too long, and too complex. It was important, however, to help people to recognize that the behaviors that they were coping with were not a character flaw, but rather the destruction of specific areas in the brain.	Created a simple chart with color-coded brain areas along with the behaviors closely associated with that area. The latter could be added one at a time to the chart.



YOUR TASK Part 1: Plan Your LNRA

If you'd like, use the LNRA Planning and Execution Form that follows (there is also another blank form in Appendix A) to plan out how you will conduct your LNRA. (You will also want to have available your notes and questions from the design worksheet you sketched out in Chapter 2). Use the ASO Triangle tool to help you plan:

- **ASK:** Who and what will you ask? *(If you feel like skipping ahead a bit, you're welcome to read about Open Questions in Chapter 11, and use the article Open Questions, Open Dialogue! found in Appendix A to help you craft your interview questions.)*
- **STUDY:** What research or demographics do you need to acquire and study?
- **OBSERVE:** What and whom will you observe that will help you better describe the learners and the situation they will return to, including how the content will be used in that setting?

LEARNING NEEDS AND RESOURCE ASSESSMENT Planning and Execution Form

ASK

Who will you ask?	What you will ask?	How will you ask? Face to face, email, survey, etc.	Findings and/or notes – what needs and resources will make a difference to what you teach and how you teach it?

STUDY

What	Notes
1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	

OBSERVE

Who and/or What	Where	When	Notes

Summary of notes:

**YOUR TASK**

Part 2: Conduct Your LNRA

Now that you have planned the LNRA, it's time to complete your LNRA: ASK, STUDY, OBSERVE. Ask some more! With whom might you share your current understanding of the learners and their situation so you could hear suggestions about any other questions you might ask, or get some alternative views of your LNRA research findings? There is more than one way to perceive information so it's great when you can reflect on your own perceptions by hearing different ones from a trusted source.

**REMEMBER**

You are looking to discover anything that will help you know more about the learners and their experience with the topic to be taught. You need to find out, from their perspective, how they can best use what they will learn back at work or home. As you look for learning needs and resources, think about how you will use the resources (strengths) that learners bring to the learning event.



YOUR TASK

Part 3: The LNRA is Done...Now What?

You've done your LNRA! Congratulations! Now you are ready to more fully flesh out or newly create the 8 Steps of Design. In the next chapters we will look at each step one by one, and there you will use the discoveries from your LNRA work.

For this next work you may want to use the worksheet that follows (or, alternatively, copy or use the worksheet in Appendix A).



REMEMBER

Each step builds upon the other. For example, if you thought you had ninety minutes for your workshop but found out during the LNRA that you have only forty-five minutes, you'll need to omit content and change your ideas about how much you can accomplish. To save time, consider what materials could be sent ahead of time or sent home with the learner to be used later.

You want to develop “the fullest” description and understanding that you can of the people participating (WHO) and the situation (WHY) that has demanded this learning event. From there you will build a design that is respectful to the learners and accountable to their circumstances.