# Learning Unit 1
# Learning resources, occupational learning materials and context

After completing this Learning Unit, you will be able to access and use available learning resources, manage occupational learning materials, and reflect on how the characteristics of the workplace and occupational context affect learning, by successfully completing the following:

- Identify relevant learning resources.

- Use learning resources effectively through appropriate selection of information and acknowledgement of sources.

- Organise occupational learning materials for efficient use.

- Understand and use layout and presentation of learning materials effectively.

- Identify sector and organisation type.

- Describe and discuss features of the occupational environment.

- Describe and discuss ways in which these features affect learning processes and/or application of learning.

- Engage with technical language/terminology and seek clarification if needed.

# Learning resources, occupational learning materials and context

The focus in this unit is on learning resources, and this unit will look in particular at what these are and how to select them as effectively as possible to help learning.

## 1.1 Access and use available learning resources

First, we should understand what we mean by 'learning'. Learning happens when we gain any new knowledge, skill, attitude or value that changes how we think or do things, or even how we feel about a subject. When we have learned something, we have better skills available to do that something, we have more knowledge about it, we have a different attitude towards it, and perhaps our values have changed in some way.

A learning resource contains information for learning. When we use any resource to get information, it becomes a *learning resource*.

### 1.1.1 Identify relevant learning resources



The learning resource that you will probably know the best is the textbook that you had at school. This contained information on a particular subject that you had to learn.

We will look at a wide range of learning resources in this unit[1]. But let us first look at where we can go to find many of these learning resources.

The best place to look for resources is a resource centre. This is usually a library in which you will find a variety of learning resources, mainly books. However, more and more libraries nowadays also include computer-based or electronic resources.

Resource centres or libraries have a number of specialised units. There is a Lending Unit with shelves of books separated into fiction books on the one hand – sorted by author's surname (A to Z), and non-fiction books on the other hand – first sorted by subject, using a numbering system (the Dewey decimal classification), then by the author's surname.

There is also a Periodicals Unit where magazines and journals are classified and stored for use. The Reference Unit keeps books for readers to use at the library.

Many libraries now have an Information Technology Unit, where electronic resources are available.

Let's now look at some of the resources you will find there.

In the Reference Unit you may find dictionaries, encyclopaedias and other reference works. The dictionary is a source of information about words and their meanings. Dictionaries can also be cross-language (for example, English-Afrikaans or English-IsiXhosa).

A Thesaurus is a dictionary-like reference book that lists words and their synonyms, and is a useful tool for writing. Encyclopaedias contain information about a large number of topics (listed A-Z). They usually extend over a number of volumes.

The Periodicals Unit stores journals and magazines. A magazine is a periodical that is published for information and entertainment. It contains short articles on a variety of topics that are aimed at a specific target readership as its focus (e.g. teenage girls, car enthusiasts,

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[1] Sourced by Matthew Goniwe School of Leadership and Governance from AgriSeta learning material

bodybuilders). A journal is also a type of periodical that contains articles, but these are published for specialised academic readers.

Each of these resources is an example of a learning resource because it can be used to find information to assist learning. Even a newspaper or a magazine can become a learning resource if it is on purpose being used as a way to find information, that is, if it is being used for research.

All of the examples mentioned above are called *print resources*, because they are printed on paper.

Over the last twenty years or so, however, the development of the microchip and its use in electronics and computers has led to massive changes in the kinds of resources we can use for learning. This technology lets us store and obtain access to information on a scale that has never been possible before.

Information can be stored electronically and retrieved for use in a number of ways.

What is the internet? It is a network of electronic communication. Anyone can have access to it as long as they have a computer (with a modem) that is linked to a service provider. Through this technology, an internet user can get access to countless websites, with all the information that these websites contain. There is more information on the internet than in any other storage system in the world. For this reason, it is potentially a very important learning resource. But it has limitations, as we shall see.

Note that e-mail is a system of electronic communication. Although information can be transmitted (sent) using e-mail (e.g. as attachments) this is not really an information storage system.

Memory sticks, CDs and DVDs are all discs that contain electronic data. The main difference between them is how much data they can store. The memory stick can store the least. In fact, it is used mainly to transfer documents from one computer to another, but it cannot hold much information compared with the other types of disc. It is therefore a transfer system rather than a storage system, and so it is not much use as a learning resource. CDs and DVDs have a much higher capacity, and so you will find such large amounts of information stored on them that truly turn them into a learning resource. So far, we have looked at two kinds of learning resources: print resources or literature and electronic resources such as the internet. But if we say that a learning resource includes any source where we can find information that we can use for learning, then there is one source of information we have not yet considered. In a way this is the simplest and oldest resource of all – other people. We all know people who know more than we do.

In fact, if you think about it, everyone knows more about something (even if it is their own life history) than anyone else. For this reason, we should never forget the value of finding out information from other people.

## 1.2 Manage occupational learning materials

The focus here is on how to manage occupational learning materials well. In this section we will look in particular at organising materials and understanding the ways that these materials are laid out and presented, so that we can use them as effectively as possible to help occupational learning.

### 1.2.1 Organise occupational learning materials for efficient use

We have already looked at a number of learning resources and learning materials and have used them in different ways. We looked at books and the internet in particular. We will now extend the range of learning materials and look more closely at what they are and how we can organise them, to make the best use of these learning materials[2].



We have talked about the difference between print material and electronic material.

When we study early childhood development (ECD), the print material we use will probably include textbooks, handouts, charts, maps, plans and diagrams. To organise these effectively, we need to arrange them in an orderly way and store them safely.

Loose sheets such as handouts and notes should be dated and put into a file that has been prepared with units or dividers that match the units of our programme. Any notes and handouts should be inserted into the relevant unit of the file in the order in which they were received, or in an order that suits the way they will be used.

**Textbooks** should be covered and the owner's name should be written in them. If you do any markings in a textbook (e.g. underlining) this should be done in pencil. Then, if the textbook is sold, the markings can be removed by rubbing them out.

You should also deal with electronic learning resources in an orderly way. When we use the internet, we need to manage all the material we download and print out. For any printout from a website, the address prints out automatically at the top of the page. We should then file these printouts in our filing system for future reference, and to make it easier for us to follow up if we want to return to that website at some future date.

**Videos** are learning resources that also need to be carefully labelled and stored.

We will look at how to best care for videos, and we will also look in some detail at how we can organise ourselves when we use videos. This will give us a better idea of how videos can be used as an occupational learning resource.

Most of us are familiar with videos as a way of watching fiction film (movies). Here, however, we will concentrate on using non-fiction or documentary videos that deal with early childhood development topics.

Where do we find such specialised documentary videos? They are available from libraries in the same way that books are.

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[2] Sourced by Matthew Goniwe School of Leadership and Governance from AgriSeta learning material

They are classified by the same categories and Dewey decimal classification numbers that we used for books in the resource centre, namely:

- Child Development 305.231
- Infants 305.232
- Children three to five 305.233
- Children six to eleven 305.234

Your local library or resource centre should have a catalogue of available videos, or you can go online to Webpals.wcape.gov.sa to check their catalogue for documentaries (in English and Afrikaans).

If your local library or resource centre does not have your choice of video available, you can make a request through them for a loan from the Western Cape Provincial Library Service and they will order it from their central library in Cape Town.

To watch the video you will need a television set (TV). TV itself is another resource. Relevant documentary or educational programmes are shown from time to time; for example, the popular Takalani Sesame on SABC 2.

### 1.2.2 Understand and use layout and presentation of learning materials

To make effective use of any resource, we need to know how it is set out, and therefore how we can locate the material most useful to our research.

Books that are designed as learning resources are organised so that they assist learning. They have standard features to help us find the information we need. We will now look at the most important of these features.

**Contents page**

The contents page is found near the front of the book, just after the title page. The contents page lists the chapters of the book, and the chapter titles give us an overview of the main focuses of the book.

Sometimes there is extra material in addition to the chapter headings: some contents pages give more information in the form of the sub-headings for each chapter.

If a book deals with a topic that is important for our field of study, it is very useful to make a photocopy of the contents pages (there is usually more than one page of contents) and keep that copy filed as a record of what is available. You can then look at it at any time when you need the information.

**Index**

The index is at the back of the book. It is a detailed list of all the items that the book deals with, together with the page/s on which those items can be found.

Sometimes the page numbers will be printed in **bold** print. This may mean that these are the pages where the item is the main topic, or it may mean that these are the pages on which you will find illustrations. To find out what specific system a particular book uses, go to the top (i.e. first page) of the index and there will be a note explaining how the numbering system works.

The index is a very useful tool in research.

When we choose a book to use when we do research, the first thing we look at is the title, which gives us a gene useful to us in our research. If we decide that the book will be of use, we then go to the index to find the details of the topic that we need.

**Glossary**
Many reference books also have a glossary at the back of the book. This is an alphabetical list of the specialised or technical terms used in that book. This word-list is often very useful; it is like a mini-dictionary and it is sometimes worth photocopying these glossary pages too, to build up your own reference bank.

**Electronic texts**
Electronic texts e.g. CDs, DVDs and web pages on the internet are laid out in a different way. The information is laid out in fields such as boxes or columns. When we read the text, instead of turning the page as we would in a book, we scroll down the screen. In a book, if we want to go to any unit dealing with a specific topic, we find it by using the contents page or the index, and then physically turning to that page. In an electronic text, the material is organised to make it easy to get to the information.

There are menus, boxes and icons (little symbols) on which we can click to locate the given topic. In this way we can navigate the document and make cross-references.

## 1.3 Reflect on how characteristics of the workplace and occupational context affect learning

We now look in some detail at the range of possible occupational environments you could find yourself in and how each of these environments affects the type of learning that will take place. You may already have experience of the workplace or may up to now simply have been a student. It is important, however, that you understand that learning does not just take place in learning institutions such as Technical Colleges, FET colleges or universities. Learning also occurs in an occupational context (that is, at work).

### 1.3.1 Identify the sector and organisation type



What do we mean when we talk about the occupational environment? Our environment refers to our surroundings. It can be defined as our social and physical conditions; in other words, the conditions that surround people and affect the way they live.

We spend most of our adult life in some type of occupation. This environment, in which we work, is our **occupational environment.** Most adults, depending on their education level, will work from their early twenties until they retire at sixty or sixty five. Obviously in economically depressed areas with few educational facilities, people might start work at a much younger age and be forced to continue working until they are too old or sick to do so.

Also in some parts of the world, unemployment is a major problem, and so not all adults can find work. The figure for unemployment in South Africa varies according to the source but can be estimated at between 20 to 40 per cent.

Depending on what type of work we end up doing, our individual workplace environments can differ enormously.

## 1.3.2 Describe and discuss features of the occupational environment

There are many different occupations. Let us spend some time looking at the focus or category of some of these occupations[3].

One important category of occupation is that of **services** or service delivery. This refers to the range of services that is supplied by different people. The service industry - broadly speaking - refers to that group of industries involved in providing **services**, as opposed to **primary** industries (such as agriculture and mining) and **secondary** industries (manufacturing and production). Service industries are generally known as **tertiary industries**. The term "services" covers a huge range of economic activities, including retailing, banking, insurance, catering, medicine, law, accountancy, cleaning, teaching, television production, the civil service, sport, transport, and many more activities.

It is possible to break down the service industry into smaller components such as financial or educational services. Each of these has a different occupational focus.

Over the past century the service sector has grown tremendously in the developed world. The service sector is now the most important sector in the advanced economies, and forms about two thirds of the total economy in countries such as the United Kingdom and the United States.

Another very significant arena of occupational focus is that relating to the manufacturing field. **Manufacturing** refers to any process in which materials or items are brought together and work is performed on them to make a saleable product. The work is done to convert (change) the separate components into an object that has more value. The manufacturer sells it and pays the wages of the workforce and other costs relating to the manufacturing process. The money that is left after paying the cost of manufacture, distribution of the product, and the sale of the product may be distributed as profit to shareholders in the company or else it may be invested in research and development of new products.

The efficiency with which raw materials or components can be brought together affects the amount of profit the manufacturer can make when the product is sold.

The following important points should be taken into account when manufacturing a product: matching the market size (how many people will want to buy the product) with the materials and methods, or processes, by which the product may be made; and making the best possible use of the factory, machines, and workers.



Modern methods of manufacturing involve computers, which may be used to control the machines that make and assemble components. Using computer-controlled machines to cut or form a product is called computer numerical control (CNC) machining. Computers may also be used to control the movement of materials, components, and finished products around the factory and the distribution of the products to their points of sale. Organising the movement of products or parts from one location to another is known as logistics. Computers can also be used to design a product.

The **mining** industry employs many people in South Africa, a country which is rich in minerals. In addition there is the field of **agriculture**. As we mentioned earlier, mining and agriculture are called **primary industries**.

We now move on to look at different types of organisations that exist in the world of work.

Government is one of the largest employers in South Africa. Because government employees are paid by money raised from taxes that are collected from the public, they are known as public servants. In other words, they are in service of the public.

**Parastatals**

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[3] Sourced by Matthew Goniwe School of Leadership and Governance from AgriSeta learning material

Parastatals can be defined as state-owned companies. The best known examples are Transnet of which SAA is a subsidiary, and Eskom. Telkom was a parastatal until 2003 when it was privatised. That means that shares in the company were issued and sold to the general public.

**Heavy industries**
Heavy industries can be described as those industries that produce basic materials, such as steel.

**Medium industries**
Medium industries produce items such as cars.

**Light industries**
Light industries produce goods such as computer parts.

Let us now look at a few differences between **large organisations** and **small businesses**. Some examples of large organisations are Old Mutual, all the major banks, Anglo American, De Beers Mining and so on. Large organisations are often a mix of bureaucratic rules and fairly progressive thinking. There are many advantages to working for a big organisation. The benefits are usually very good and there is a sense of stability.

Small businesses, on the other hand, are enterprises which are started by one or two people who usually put up their own capital. An example of a small business could be a business which makes ornaments out of the bark of a certain tree and employs four people. The rewards for working in a small business are that one could experience greater challenges and feel more directly involved in the process. Some of the disadvantages are that one could be insecure, have an irregular income and not be assured of benefits.

By the time you start your career you will have had a broad range of learning. If you have been to college, you will have learnt about the theory of early childhood development and the practical aspects of developing young children. You will have experienced transmission teaching whereby information is passed on to you by a lecturer or by means of notes. You will also have experienced more interactive learning methods in which you undertook small research projects, went on field trips, collected and analysed data, worked in groups, accessed information on the internet, presented your findings and so on. You will also have done some courses such as this one which deal with broad general topics like communication and numeracy. Altogether you will possess a wide range of skills and learning strategies. How will you apply these in your occupational environment? Will you stop learning once you leave college?

The answer to the second question is a definite and resounding "no". No matter how thorough your basic training has been there will always be aspects to your work that require you to learn new things.

We can group the types of application of learning that you will need in the workplace.

Firstly, there is **technological** knowledge. Many of your courses will have provided you with much of the knowledge that is necessary. You may, however, end up working in an occupation that requires very specific technological expertise (knowledge) and you may have to learn this as well as apply what you already know.

Secondly, in any work environment you will require **communication** skills. Even if you end up being a researcher who does not interact with clients or employees in any way, you would still have to communicate with colleagues and communicate your findings in public arenas. Hopefully the work you do in this module will sharpen your communication skills so that you can communicate with a wide range of people and use appropriate communication strategies in the workplace.

One aspect of communication that has not been dealt with is **multilingualism.** In our country there is often a need to be able to communicate effectively in more than one language. It would be extremely valuable to you as a future employee to become as proficient (skilled) as possible in all of these languages. Most people appreciate it when others at least try to speak their language and multilingualism ensures that you are able to communicate effectively with a far broader range of people in your occupational environment.

## 1.4 Engage with technical language/terminology

In any field of study, there is a vocabulary of terminology that is specific to that field. Part of learning about a subject is learning this new language. It is important to understand the meaning of these new words because you are then learning the concepts or ideas that they refer to. This understanding develops while we use the terms in their context, and successful learning of a subject is linked to learning the language of that subject in a meaningful way.

In our studies we will therefore come across many new words. How do we help ourselves to make the best use of this?

Firstly, we need to recognise that it is a new word. So if we hear a term being used, or if we have read a word we do not understand, we need to make a note of that word. We will probably have an idea of its meaning from the context, but how do we make sure that we have the right idea? If possible, we can ask then and there.

Otherwise we go to a resource (print or electronic dictionary) and look it up. Many technical terms are not found in an ordinary dictionary, but there are dictionaries or glossaries of terms that are specialised for a particular field of study.

Finally, we should keep our own glossary of terms, and add to it as we acquire new terms. This is especially helpful if we are learning in a language that is not our mother tongue.

***Class Activity 1: Learning resources, occupational learning materials and context***
Please follow the instructions from the facilitator to complete the formative activity in your Learner Workbook.