

To Teach So They Can Learn

Ilda Carreiro King, PhD

This session was arranged by the
Social Science Division and the
Education Division
and is graciously sponsored by

Grey House
Publishing

The logo for Grey House Publishing features the words "Grey House" on the top line and "Publishing" on the bottom line. The first letter of each word is significantly larger than the rest of the letters. The entire text is enclosed within a dark red rectangular border. Below the bottom border, there is a thick, solid black horizontal bar.

Adults As Learners

Part of being an effective instructor involves understanding how adults learn best.

Adult learners come to a course with precisely defined expectations.

The best motivators for adult learners are interest and selfish benefit.

If they can be shown that the course benefits them pragmatically, they will perform better, and the benefits will be longer lasting.

Child and Adult Learning Characteristics

Children

Rely on others to decide what is important to be learned.

Accept the information being presented at face value.

Expect what they are learning to be useful in their long-term future.

Have little or no experience upon which to draw, are relatively "blank slates."

Little ability to serve as a knowledgeable resource to teacher or fellow classmates.

Adults

Decide for themselves what is important to be learned.

Need to validate the information based on their beliefs and values.

Expect what they are learning to be immediately useful.

Have substantial experience upon which to draw. May have fixed viewpoints.

Significant ability to serve as a knowledgeable resource to the trainer and fellow learners.

The field of adult learning was pioneered by Malcolm Knowles. He identified the following characteristics of adult learners:

1. Adults are *autonomous* and *self-directed*. They need to be free to direct themselves.

Instructors must:

- actively involve adult participants in the learning process and serve as facilitators for them
- get participants' perspectives about what topics to cover and let them work on projects that reflect their interests
- allow the participants to assume responsibility for presentations and group leadership
- be sure to act as facilitators, guiding participants to their own knowledge rather than supplying them with facts
- must show participants how the class will help them reach their goals (e.g., via a personal goals sheet).

2. Adults have accumulated a foundation of *life experiences* and *knowledge* that may include work-related activities, family responsibilities, and previous education. They need to connect learning to this knowledge/experience base.

Instructors should:

- draw out participants' experience and knowledge which is relevant to the topic
- relate theories and concepts to the participants and recognize the value of experience in learning.
- Adults are *goal-oriented*. Upon enrolling in a course, they usually know what goal they want to attain.

Instructors should:

- Present an educational program that is organized and has clearly defined elements
 - show participants how this class will help them attain their goals. This classification of goals and course objectives must be done early in the course.
 - consider using a pre and post test that becomes the goal for learning the material
3. Adults are *relevancy-oriented*. They must see a reason for learning something. Learning has to be applicable to their work or other responsibilities to be of value to them.

Instructors should:

- identify objectives for adult participants before the course begins
 - relate theories and concepts to a setting familiar to participants. This need can be fulfilled by letting participants choose projects that reflect their own interests.
4. Adults are *practical*, focusing on the aspects of a lesson most useful to them in their work. They may not be interested in knowledge for its own sake.

Instructors must:

- tell participants explicitly how the lesson will be useful to them on the job.
5. As do all learners, adults need to be shown *respect*.

Instructors must:

- acknowledge the wealth of experiences that adult participants bring to the classroom.
- Treat adults as equals in experience and knowledge and allowed to voice their opinions freely in class.

Dr. King does not have permission to post the "Professional Learning Strategies and Their Level of Impact" table that she showed in her presentation. If you'd like to access that table, see:

National Staff Development Council. "Professional Learning Strategies and their Level of Impact." *The Learning System*, May 2006, Vol. 1, No. 8.

It is available for purchase (\$5) at http://store.nsd.org/merchant.mv?Screen=PROD&Store_Code=NRC&Product_Code=S01800

Learning Tips for Effective Instructors

There are five critical elements of learning that must be addressed to ensure that participants learn. These elements are

1. motivation
2. feedback
3. reinforcement
4. retention
5. transference

1. **Motivation.** If the participant does not recognize the need for the information (or has been offended or intimidated), all of the instructor's effort to assist the participant to learn will be in vain. The instructor must establish rapport with participants and prepare them for learning

Instructors can motivate students via several means:

- **Set a feeling or tone for the lesson.** Instructors should try to establish a friendly, open atmosphere that shows the participants they will help them learn.
- **Set an appropriate level of concern.** The level of tension must be adjusted to meet the level of importance of the objective. If the material has a high level of importance, a higher level of tension/stress should be established in the class. However, people learn best under low to moderate stress; if the stress is too high, it becomes a barrier to learning.
- **Set an appropriate level of difficulty.** The degree of difficulty should be set high enough to challenge participants but not so high that they become frustrated by information overload. The instruction should predict and reward participation, culminating in success.

2. Performance Feedback. Participants need specific knowledge of their learning results (*feedback*).

Instructors should:

- provide opportunities for extensive coached practice with corrective feedback and sustained effort for skill improvement and learning to occur
- create or facilitate opportunities for peers to coach each other with scripts so that coaches internalize teacher words and monitoring of performance
- use objective, task specific, formative feedback
- not use social comparative information

3. Reinforcement. Reinforcement is a very necessary part of the teaching/learning process; through it, instructors encourage correct modes of behavior

Reinforcement should be part of the teaching-learning process to ensure correct behavior.

Instructors need to use reinforcement:

- on a frequent and regular basis
- early in the process to help the students retain what they have learned.
- then only to maintain consistent, positive behavior.

4. **Retention.** Students must retain information from classes in order to benefit from the learning. The instructors' jobs are not finished until they have assisted the learner in retaining the information.

Participants must:

- see a meaning or purpose for that information
- understand and be able to interpret and apply the information.

Retention by the participants is directly affected by their amount of practice during the learning.

Instructors should emphasize retention and application.

After the students demonstrate correct (desired) performance, they should be urged to practice to maintain the desired performance.

Practice with peers subsequent to learning sessions is a strong reinforcer.

5. **Transference.** Transfer of learning is the result of training -- it is the ability to use the information taught in the course but in a new setting.

Transference is most likely to occur in the following situations:

- *Association* -- participants can associate the new information with something that they already know.
- *Similarity* -- the information is similar to material that participants already know; that is, it revisits a logical framework or pattern.
- *Degree of original learning* -- participant's degree of original learning was high.
- *Critical attribute element* -- the information learned contains elements that are extremely beneficial (critical) on the job.

Recommended Resources

Techniques for Teaching Adults, and Structuring Your Classroom
Presentation

www.pested.msu.edu/PesticideApplicatorCertification/RTAT%20Manual/RTATSection7.pdf

Principles of Adult Learning

<http://honolulu.hawaii.edu/intranet/committees/FacDevCom/guidebk/teachtip/adults-2.htm>

Kathleen Taylor, Catherine Marienau, Morris Fiddler, eds. *Developing Adult Learners: Strategies for Teachers and Trainers*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey Bass, 2000.

Arnold, K., & Carreiro King, I. (Eds.). (1997). *College student development and academic life: Psychological, intellectual, social, and moral issues*. (Contemporary Higher Education, Vol. 4). New York: Garland.