



PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT FOR ADULT LEARNERS

When the program developer understands the adult learner and knows productive facilitator skills, the opportunity for participants to gain new knowledge through a program is enhanced. Adults are motivated to learn when their needs and learning styles are factored into a learning activity. Making learning a positive experience will help promote lifelong learning in adults.

During a traditional learning activity, there is a “teacher” and a “student.” In an adult learning experience, the roles of these individuals may not be as well defined as in the classroom model we remember from school. The “teacher” should know adult learning styles and adopt the role of “facilitator” to effectively educate adult students.

ADULT LEARNING PRINCIPLES

Adults have a need to know. They are ready and motivated to learn when they can identify how a new skill will benefit them. If they come into the activity feeling that they do not need this knowledge, they will not learn it. Sometimes they may be clear to the learner, but the facilitator should always take the time to clarify the benefits of the learning activity. The more adults have their “need to know” met, the more likely they are to fully participate and benefit from the learning activity.

An adult approaches learning to find answers or solutions to identified problems or questions. The facilitator's role is to help participants learn the material but also how to apply it in actual situations. Since program participants seek knowledge that is applicable to their circumstances, effective adult learning activities should include simulations, case studies, and problem-based learning.

Although adult learners already know a lot, they may not recognize how much they already know. A good facilitator helps them realize what they have learned from experience, practice, and education and how to apply it to the new knowledge they are gaining. Adults are capable of connecting what they are learning with applications in the real world; a facilitator assists with the links.

Adults also bring career experience, social relationships, cultural involvement, and personal interests to educational programs. Through the process of aging and maturing, adults have gained emotions, values, priorities, insight, and logic. What an adult brings into the classroom will shape what and how they learn. An effective facilitator should respect this and incorporate the participants' experiences into the learning activity. This will provide a basis for learning and enhance the educational experience.

Adult learners have control over their own learning. Facilitators must respect this. Adults make their own educational decisions based on factors both internal (need, desire) and external (career, social). The facilitator must not force information, activities, or a learning style onto the adult. Since good facilitators are more focused on the outcome of the session and understand how adult learning styles and needs may vary, they are flexible and able to vary any structured “lesson plan” to meet the group's needs and styles.

Motivate learning. Encourage, excite, and inspire the learner about ideas and information.

Know the levels of knowledge of the group. Be careful not to talk down to participants or talk over their heads. A simple assessment (oral or written) should be done before the start of the session. This will also tell the facilitator who has background knowledge or experiences that can contribute to the discussions.

INTERACTION AND LEARNER RETENTION

AIA/CES encourages Providers to develop programs that facilitate audience interaction. Activities requiring interaction are more valuable for your attendees because they learn better and retain the information longer.

Encourage interaction by:

- Asking questions that stimulate discussion.
- Handling conflict to encourage responsible participation and open discussion of disagreement.
- Administering interactive activities to deliver content.

INSTRUCTIONAL DELIVERY METHODS

The instructional techniques outlined below offer examples of activities you can incorporate into your program to guarantee audience interaction.

PASSIVE

In a passive learning activity, the instructor does most of the presenting and the learner takes a passive role. The learner is mostly listening, watching, and absorbing the information without significant interaction.

Examples

Keynote presentation at a conference
Lecture series
Listening to audiocassettes
Viewing a video
Slide presentation
Facility tour
Reading materials

INTERACTIVE

An interactive learning activity provides significant opportunities for participants to interact with each other and/or the learning resources. The learner is actively engaged in the learning process.

Examples

Case studies
Discussions among presenter and/or other audience members
Group exercises and discussion
Hands-on activity
Interactive computer software
Problem solving/workbook exercises
Roundtable discussion, focus groups
Simulations, role playing

FEEDBACK

This learning activity incorporates measurement, evaluation, and feedback on the learner's progress. This is not an evaluation of the instructor or program by the learner. In this level of activity, the learner is getting feedback on how much he/she is actually learning.

Examples

Computer use and application
Demonstration and review of learned skill or knowledge
Design competition/charrette
Post-review of work, task, or performance by expert(s)
Post-tests

For each program, determine the best delivery method to meet educational objectives. Include interactive learning so participants have opportunities to interact with the instructor(s), learning resources, and/or other learners.

Your resources include:

HUMAN RESOURCES

In-house expert
Industry representative
Independent expert or consultant
Practitioner in the field
School faculty member
Other persons with appropriate experience, education, references, or certification

MATERIAL RESOURCES

Journal articles
Computer software
Audiotapes
Teleconferences
Tutorial software
On-site observations
Books or manuals
Program handouts
Videotapes
Slides or overheads
Other resources supported by a bibliography, data, lab tests, or research results

When appropriate, develop a program that provides formal measurement, evaluation, and feedback of the learner's progress so that he/she can better benefit from the program. This is not an evaluation of the instructor or program by the learner, rather it is feedback for the learner to determine what he/she learned. Provide each participant with a written summary sheet of the major points of the program or other resources for use as a later reference.

SELECTING A TEACHING FORMAT

The content and learning objectives must be determined before the teaching method or vehicle of delivery can be determined. Planning a program first around the style of teaching may mean that the learning objectives cannot be met because they are not compatible with the format. You can decide to give a lecture, but if the learning objective is to "compare their ideas of environmental sound design with those of their peers," then the teaching method needs to allow for audience interaction.

Examples of teaching methods or delivery styles include:

Lecture	Roundtable discussion	Models	Tours
Debate	Hypothetical situation	Case study	Worksheets
Panel discussions	Demonstration	Video/audio	Simulations
Q & A		Exhibits	

Be aware of how the agenda is set up. Remember that people cannot sit for more than an hour and a half without needing a break; learning is most effective in the morning and less so right after lunch; and the learning environment should be supportive of the learning objectives.

If you are going to take your time, and the time of the participants, to deliver an educational program, be sure it meets the needs of the audience.