

Facilitating Adult Learning

**How to
Teach
so
People
Learn**



Prepared by:

Dr. Lela Vandenberg
Senior Leadership & Professional Development Specialist
11 Agriculture Hall
East Lansing, MI 48824-1039
(517) 353-1898
vanden34@msu.edu

Five Principles of Adult Learning

It's one thing to teach. It's another thing to learn, and the two don't always go hand-in-hand. As educators, our job is to **facilitate learning**, that is, to do what we can to make sure people learn what we want to teach them. Incorporating five basic principles in your program design can ensure that your learners really do learn. These are based on years of research in adult learning.

- 1) **Personal Benefit.** Adult learners must be able to see the personal benefit of what they are learning, and how it satisfies a need they have. They are motivated to learn if the learning
 - Solves or avoids a problem for them;
 - Provides an opportunity or increased status;
 - Leads to professional or personal growth.

- 2) **Experience.** Adult learners come to each learning event with a unique background of knowledge and experience. They are motivated to learn if the learning
 - Involves them in sharing what they know;
 - Builds on what they know;
 - Validates their expertise.

- 3) **Self Direction.** Adult learners are self-directed and must have some control over what they are learning. They are motivated to learn if they can
 - Take charge of their learning and make decisions about the content and process;
 - Contribute to the learning of their co-learners;
 - Have some degree of independence in the learning process.

- 4) **Application & Action.** Adult learners are busy, practical, and learn by doing. They learn best when
 - There is immediate application for the learning;
 - They participate actively in the learning process;
 - They can practice new skills or test new knowledge before leaving a learning session.

- 5) **Learning Styles.** Adult learners approach learning in a great variety of ways, from hands-on and moving to using their eyes, ears, and/or logic to anchor new skills and knowledge. They learn best when
 - The learning taps into a mix of learning styles that fit their preferences and stimulate their 'multiple intelligences';
 - Multiple means are used to represent the material being learned.

Key references available in the Professional Development Library:

Bowman, S. 2003. **How to Give It so They Get It**;
Knowles, M. et al. 2005. **The Adult Learner**;
Stolovitch, H.D. and Keeps, E.J. 2002. **Telling Ain't Training**;
Tamblyn, D. 2003. **Laugh and Learn**;
Vella, J. 2002. **Learning to Listen Learning to Teach**;
Wlodkowski. R.J. 2008. **Enhancing Adult Motivation to Learn**.

Techniques for Facilitating Learning

There are a number of powerful methods to help your learners retain what you teach. If you are lecturing, with or without PowerPoint, stop every 15-30 minutes and engage learners in an activity to reinforce learning. For some topics, learners may already know some of what you'll teach, or have experience with it. Some of the activities suggested below involve having them brainstorm first, with you filling in the blanks in their knowledge afterwards. These participatory methods focus on **five participatory processes**: reflecting, summarizing, sharing knowledge, teaching, and receiving feedback. Each of these is described below, with suggested learning activities.

A. REFLECT

Learning is enhanced if we are given a chance to reflect, review, and personally relate to the material and how we might apply it. Give participants a log or journal, then use a variety of ways to have participants stop and reflect periodically for a few minutes on what they've learned and how they might use it. After the reflection time you can have them volunteer to share, share in small groups, or not share. Here are six examples:

- 1) **Most Important:** *Write three things you just learned. Now put a star by the most important.*
- 2) **Three Applications:** *Write three ways you can use or apply what you've just learned. Circle the one you plan to do first.*
- 3) **One Sentence:** *Write one sentence explaining what you learned in the last _____ minutes.*
- 4) **One Question:** *Write one question that you have about what you've heard.*
- 5) **Wow / How About:** *On a sticky note, write a "WOW"—something you learned that was important to you. On another sticky note, write a "HOW ABOUT"? question or other idea you might have. Post your notes on the two flip charts (labeled WOW and HOW ABOUT). Build in some time to debrief the two charts.*
- 6) **Highlights:** *Spend the next four minutes reading and reviewing the notes and the other information in your packet. Highlight the important points. Write any questions you still have.*

B. SUMMARIZE

Having learners summarize, in a sentence or two, the most important things they have just learned is another powerful way to have them interact with the content and fix it in their minds. Here are 7 fun ways they can share their summaries with others.

- 1) **Best Summaries:** On an index card, each participant prepares a summary of the main points at the end of a segment or topic. On the other side of the card have them put a code or

identifying PIN. Teams of 4-7 collect their cards and exchange them with another team. Then each team selects the best summary from the set of cards they were given. Each team reads the summary to the whole group. Also read the identifying PIN so the author can be congratulated.

- 2) **Essence:** Explain this activity at the beginning of a presentation to spark a competitive spirit and motivate participants to pay close attention. Following the presentation, divide the group into teams of 3-7. There are four rounds. 1—Tell them to create a 32 word summary of what they have learned. Have each group read their summary, then participants vote for the best by raising their hands. There are two rules: they can only vote once, and they can't vote for their own team's summary. 2—Repeat the process but now the summary must be only 16 words. 3—Repeat the process for an 8-word summary. 4—Repeat the process for a 4-word summary. 5—Repeat the process for a 2-word summary.
- 3) **Superlatives:** After a presentation, ask participants to identify the most important piece of information or concept that you presented. Give them time to think and jot an idea down. Ask for responses. Then ask them to identify the most _____ thing you presented and share that with a partner. Take a few responses in the whole group. Continue this process, substituting superlatives in the blank. Some possible superlatives include: useful, controversial, difficult to understand, surprising, universal, obvious, etc.
- 4) **Thirty-Five:** After a presentation, distribute index cards to participants. Give them 2 minutes to write one sentence that summarizes an important idea they learned. Have them stand up and exchange their card, blank side up, with someone else. They should continue exchanging cards with others for about 20 seconds. At your signal have them find a partner and read each other the sentences on their cards. Tell them they have 7 “merit points” to distribute between their two cards (no fractions or negative numbers). They should write the allotted number on the blank side of the card, at the top. Repeat the process—exchange cards for 20 seconds, find a new partner, read the sentences, assign points—four more times. Ask them to return to their seats and add up the points for the card they have. The highest possible score is 35. Last comes the count down to the winning sentence. Start counting down from 35. When a participant hears the number that is the total for the card they have, he or she should stand up and read the card. Do this for the top 5-10 cards. You can invite participants to make brief comments. You can also offer to type the cards and send them out to participants.
- 5) **Open and Closed:** At the end of a presentation, have each participant write a closed-ended question and an open-ended question on index cards. Warn them ahead of time that you will ask them to do this so they will pay close attention and take good notes. For round one, have them pair up and ask each other their closed questions. Have them switch partners 4 or 5 times. For round two, have them get in triads and ask each other their open questions.
- 6) **Picture Summary:** Divide participants into small groups and give each a flip chart or flip chart sheet. Their task is to design a poster that summarizes the key points they've learned. There are 4 rules: 1—page limit is one sheet of paper; 2—only pictures can be used, which includes

graphics, symbols, icons, or diagrams but not words, letters or numbers; 3—joint effort, meaning that all team members should contribute; and 4—time limit is 5 minutes.

- 7) Flip Chart Summary:** Divide participants into small groups and give each a flip chart or flip chart sheet. Their task is to design a poster that summarizes the key points they've learned. There are 3 rules: 1—page limit is one sheet of paper; 2—joint effort, meaning that all team members should contribute; and 3—time limit is 5 minutes.
-

C. SHARE KNOWLEDGE

Often learners have some knowledge of or experience with the subject they are learning. To build on what they know, to give them some control over content, and to validate their expertise try some of the following ideas.

- 1) Brainstorm:** Ask participants, in groups, to think about a question related to a topic and brainstorm answers on a flip chart sheet. Have each group share, and then you fill in missing information verbally, and/or from a handout.
- 2) Leaky Fishbowl:** If participants have some but different levels or types of knowledge of the material you'll be covering, this is a good technique for tapping the knowledge of the group. Have 5-7 volunteers sit in a circle in the middle of the group. If the group is large, have them pass a microphone around. Have a set of questions ready, and give the small group a question to discuss. There are two rules: only those in the middle of the circle can talk; and those outside the circle can join it by standing behind someone until an inner circle participant voluntarily vacates his or her chair. Periodically give a new question to be discussed. If someone shares something that is incorrect, feel free to break in and question the group or provide the correct information. It's also a good idea to take notes on a flip chart during this process.
- 3) Item List:** Have a list or outline of the topics you are prepared to teach on a flip chart. Give participants a few sticky dots and have them mark the ones that are highest priority for them to hear about from you. Be sure you give most emphasis to those topics in your presentation, and spend less time on the low priority items.
- 4) Press Conference:** Give the outline of your presentation to participants as well as a brief overview of key objectives and major topics. Divide participants into small groups, using the same number of groups as topics you will be covering. Give each group a number of index cards, equal to the number of topics your presentation covers. Have the groups write one question for each topic to be covered. They should either label each card with the topic, OR use a different color of card for each topic. Collect all the cards; then redistribute them, giving all the cards of one topic (and color) to each group. Have the groups take turns grilling you with their questions, as in a press conference. Be sure to ask participants to help you answer the questions when they can.

- 5) **EG Hunt:** After a presentation or a portion of a presentation, have small groups of participants brainstorm and come up with specific examples of a principle, concept, or skill. Have each group share their example in the large group.
 - 6) **Confusion:** Give your presentation in segments. After each segment have participants write two questions or points of confusion anonymously on two index cards. Give them 1 minute. Have them stand up and exchange the cards with the written side down, with as many people as possible for about 30 seconds. When you call time, they should sit down with the two cards left in their hands. Then conduct a question and answer session with participants volunteering to read a question on one of their cards. Be sure to ask if any of the participants can answer or explain before you do.
-

D. TEACH

We learn best what we have to teach. Here are some ideas for engaging the learners in teaching.

- 1) **Pair Share**—Have participants take a minute to tell a partner what they've learned and how they will use it.
 - 2) **Triad Teaching**—Divide participants into threes and have each person—either verbally or with symbols, icons or drawings—teach the other(s) something they have learned.
 - 3) **Showtime**—Divide participants into small groups and assign each a portion of the material that has been presented. Have each group prepare and give a short, creative, playful presentation on their topic.
-

E. RECEIVE FEEDBACK

Adult learners enjoy getting feedback on what they have learned. Fun ways to self-test what they have learned motivates and empowers them to take more active control of their learning.

- 1) **Bingo:** In advance, create at least 25 questions that cover the material you will be presenting. In creating the questions, ask yourself: *If they can only take away 25 things from what I presented, what would I want those to be?* Create a one-page 5x5 matrix, a grid with 25 boxes. Put a one-word or short-phrase answer to each of your questions in each of the boxes. Either at the end or at intervals during your presentation, ask one or more of the 25 questions. Have participants find the answers on their cards either individually or in pairs or teams. Tell them that as soon as the individual or team thinks they have the right answer, they should stand up. The first to stand gets to share their answer. If they're correct, they get to cross off a box on their sheet. If wrong, the next one standing gets to give an answer. Continue until someone gets BINGO or until you've gone through all the questions and answers.
- 2) **Jeopardy:** *Before the training*, think of four or five categories that you would want participants to know about. Create questions on the most important topics in those categories; write each on a 5x7 or 8x11 card or sheet; assign a point/monetary value to each question; and write this

on the back of the card. Post the categories on a board or wall. Post the questions with point/monetary value side up so participants can choose a point value. Finally, choose one special question for the final round. This should be the one thing that you want participants to take away from your training.

To play the game, divide the group into teams. Have each group choose a number or roll a dice to see who goes first. Each group chooses a category and a point value. Turn the card over, read the question, and they try to answer it. The group can confer for a determined amount of time before giving their answer. If they get the answer correct, they earn the allotted points. Keep a point list on a flip chart visible to everyone. Once a team has answered a question, move on to the next team until all the questions are answered.

For the final round, have groups wager a point value for final jeopardy and write these down. Read the final jeopardy question to the groups. Have them write down their answers in a specified amount of time. Then have each group read their answers and reveal their point values. Add or subtract them from their teams' scores. The group with the most points wins the game! (The groups could be given prizes that help to emphasize the learning points).

- 3) **Crosswords:** Create a crossword puzzle with clues that test understanding of the key ideas and concepts you are presenting. To create the puzzle using words and definitions from the content you are teaching, use the free Eclipse Crossword software available at: <http://www.eclipsecrossword.com/tour.html>, or the "Crossword Compiler" software, available at <http://www.Crossword-compiler.com> for \$49. Stop at periodic intervals and have pairs of participants complete as much of the puzzle as they can.
- 4) **Team Quiz:** Before your presentation, tell participants that you will be stopping periodically (about every 10 minutes) to have them, in groups of 3-5, write two questions for their fellow participants. One should be factual and the other should be open-ended, requiring some evaluation, synthesis, or inferential thinking. Give them 3 minutes to write the questions. Debrief by having each team, one-by-one, ask their factual questions. Then do the open-ended questions. Teams can answer in consultation with each other. Make sure that everyone gets a chance to answer some questions.

Some ideas are drawn from: **Thiagi's Interactive Lectures** by Sivasailam Thiagarajan, 2005, and **Presenting with Pizzazz** by Sharon Bowman, 1997.