

Teaching

Learning Process



Learning is more than gaining knowledge or increasing skills. Learning involves a change in the way we think, act and feel. A participant is more willing to learn if the lessons are well organized, interesting

and important to him/her. Getting the participant involved will make learning more interesting.

Principles of learning:

- The information must be meaningful and of interest to the participant.
- The learning process will be effective as long as the program objectives are clear, realistic and relevant to the participant's situation/needs.

- Practice leads to effective learning.
- Learning is increased by reinforcement.
- New habits do not automatically substitute old habits.
- Learning must be organized in sequence for cumulative effects.

Barriers to learning in the adult situation:

- Fear of failure- to be involved in a situation that may damage their self-concept.
- An acquired dislike for school.
- The influence of stress and anxiety- not knowing what to expect or what is expected can lead to a stress level that may interfere with the learning process.
- The attitude that "I'm too old to learn."
- Competition for the adult's time- people tend to spend their time doing things *they* believe are important.

Teaching the Low Income Audience

Understanding the Audience

Warmth, acceptance, respect, and sincerity are basic to a teacher/learner relationship. This principle applies both when the professional teaches the paraprofessional and when the paraprofessional teaches the program participants. Paraprofessionals need to acquire an understanding of the program audience and to appreciate the fact that different people have different values. It is important to recognize and respect the values of other people with whom one works. Paraprofessionals who anticipate and accept these differences can help build a cordial, trusting relationship with the program participants.

Paraprofessionals should understand that learning is likely to take place when the learner:

- Is motivated, thinking, feeling, doing, and involved in the content of the lesson.
- Feels a need for information or a new way of doing.
- Sees how a new information or behavior can be personally useful.
- Gains satisfaction from learning.
- Develops standards against which new behaviors are judged.
- Continues to grow after there is self-motivation.
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Identifying Needs and Interest of the Audience

Encourage paraprofessionals to note the needs of the program participants and share these observations with the EFNEP agent. Teaching plans can be modified to meet these needs. This is crucial in holding the participant's interest. Paraprofessionals must distinguish between needs the program can meet and those it cannot. Some problems should be referred to other agencies, but paraprofessionals should be careful not to promise results that depend on the decisions of those agencies.

The face-to-face approach is personal. It allows discussion of the participant's interest, concerns, and needs. This human element establishes the rapport which facilitates learning. During training, discuss ways by which paraprofessionals can engage participants in conversations and how to get participants to accept the paraprofessional.

Teaching Methods

Many teaching methods used in training paraprofessionals can be adapted to help them teach program participants. It can be mentioned that learners enjoy and benefit from a variety of teaching methods that actively involve the learner. Educational materials used for teaching should attract the interest of the learner, should be easy to understand and should provide for feedback so that the paraprofessional can tell whether learning is taking place. When teaching low income audiences:

- Use examples generously and always ask yourself, "Does this fit the experience of the low income client?" A good instructor must be familiar with the audience's way of life and avoid references that mean little to the participants.
 - Be explicit. Never assume that the participant has the same background and information than the instructor. Start from the beginning.
- Explain all the details. Use many illustrations. Repeat often. Summarize several times. Have participants explain what they heard or understood. Go slowly and be patient.
- Avoid creating frustrations in the participants. Be prepared. Have materials, handouts, and resources on hand. Is it expected that the participant have supplies available for the learning situation? Can the participant(s) read well enough to follow written instructions?
 - Plan learning experiences for other family members, particularly for children. In contacts with low income clientele, paraprofessionals will interact frequently with other members of the family.
 - Plan for success. The participant should experience success—no matter how small—as quickly as possible.