



LAES has developed a series of immigrant issue instructional modules entitled "Tierra de Oportunidad" for orientation to our complex society.

INSTRUCTIONAL AREA:

Developing Lifelong Learning

Tierra de Oportunidad - Module 30

Making Choices About Jobs

Overview

To become efficient and effective learners is a challenge faced by all adult learners, particularly immigrants who have had little schooling. There are many new skills to develop and little time for practicing them, to learn efficiently is a concern. There are new and unfamiliar skills to acquire and nurture, so the ability to learn effectively is of equal concern.

The ability to learn is part natural human trait and part learned ability. Students can benefit from defining their own learning style while, at the same time, practicing flexibility and learning in different ways.

It is crucial for instructors to explain and demonstrate how learning is part of life, not a separate isolated ability. Adult students, who have had many successes in coping with the challenges they face in their lives, need to value versatility and creative problem-solving as a foundation for effective and efficient learning.

For many whose schooling took place in a traditional school environment, it is necessary to understand that efficient and effective learning does not mean being able to memorize. People learn to remember what they've learned by taking notes, reviewing teaching points, writing or stating an overview.

Efforts to put an overview together can be individual efforts (making notes, framing questions, drawing diagrams, outlining, practicing new skills, supplemental research and reading), or group efforts (discussions, debates, coaching, questioning, seeking feedback, joint teamwork). Efforts to enhance one's rate of learning and scope of learning must take place both in class and out of class.

Adult learners should be introduced to the idea that learning not only involves acquiring new information but, also, synthesizing it. As in art, we need to value innovation, elegance, and individual style in learning. Students should be encouraged to summarize in novel ways and encouraged to explore their own individual style for synthesizing information.

To gain new perspectives on the challenges of learning to learn may be for adult learners to review some of the strategies used by children to achieve tremendous rates of learning. These include: constant curiosity and a willingness to explore, a willingness to "take risks" by putting forward new ideas or theories, spending "time on task", practicing new skills, willingness to constantly ask questions, personal flexibility, attentive listening, willingness to help others learn which strengthens one's own skills. These are all behaviors which children and adults share in common.

Where adult learning differs from the learning of young children is that adults have the ability to reflect on how they are doing as learners, identify the problems they are experiencing, formulate and try out strategies for overcoming these problems. This process can be an individual self-reflection or a process of interacting with others. Reflection is not a "luxury". It is a necessity for effective learning. It forms the foundation for discovering where one is going, in the immediate

future and in the long run.

Adults also have an advantage in being able to direct their own learning. The first, and perhaps most difficult step, in this area is for adult learners to recognize their responsibility to be proactive learners and to initiate and follow through actively with efforts to learn better and faster.

The most valuable contribution an adult education class can make to an adult learner's personal development is not to finish the process of skills-building, but rather to jump start the process of lifelong self-directed learning. Every adult learner should leave an adult education class with their own personal "learning toolkit" of useful techniques for effective learning and their own personal plan for lifelong learning. Students in ESL classes need to practice in the community, the language structures learned in the classroom as part of their own personal plan.

Students working on Tierra de Oportunidad modules, should be expected to acquire the key information in the module and to build their skills as effective and efficient learners -- by participating actively in group discussions and research projects, by recognizing the importance of time on task, by working outside of class to increase their skills, by courteously questioning speakers, by working actively to help their classmates learn and by reflecting on the next steps to follow.

Basic Skills Development

This curriculum module provides a valuable opportunity for adult education instructors to engage their students in reflecting on why they are attending an adult learning program, where they are going, and what they need to do to successfully achieve their goals. We highly recommend that this module be used in every ABE and ESL class because current research suggests that adult learners will only truly benefit from being in a program if they know how to turn their adult program experience into an ongoing process of lifelong learning.

Basic Skills

Using print resources for targeted learning, e.g. manuals, catalogs, indexes; using graphs and tables; taking notes, making outlines and diagrams to assist in learning.

Critical Thinking

Formulating and posing questions; paraphrasing to check understanding.

Identifying individualized strategies for effective learning; recognizing the value of reflection, consultation, and dialogue as tools for learning.

Learning to Learn

Recognizing one's own learning style, interests, aptitudes and aspirations; listing personal effective learning strategies; preparing an overall lifelong learning plan; detailing an action plan of "next steps".

Personal Qualities

Increasing personal responsibility in learning; increasing time on task building and refining new skills, making a commitment to lifelong learning.

Uses Resources

Using appropriate and available human as well as print and electronic resources to the maximum extent possible for learning.

Interpersonal skills

Active questioning, active listening to clarify, coaching, tutoring, summarizing.

Working With Systems

Accepting workplace as a learning environment; applying the value of learning in structured and informal environments.

Teaching Points

1. **Lifelong learning is necessary to achieve social and economic equity in the U.S.** A class will not magically build the students skills. It will help students move forward and make valuable progress toward their learning goals, it will give students a jump start to prepare them to succeed in ongoing lifelong learning. Without the commitment to keep on learning -- in their daily lives, at work, and at home -- students cannot achieve full equality in the United States.
2. **Everyone can learn and can enjoy learning.** If students develop the self-confidence to learn, if they demand that they get quality and relevant instruction, and if they take the responsibility to work actively and diligently to make the maximum use of every learning opportunity. Adult learners can take charge of their own learning. Effective learning requires active hard work, but it is also fun and rewarding.
3. **Learning is an active process. Active learning means asking questions and making sure one really understands.** Everyone learns best when they ask questions to clarify points they have not understood. Paraphrasing a point is a valuable way for a learner to confirm they have understood a fact fully or grasped an issue well; it is also an extremely useful technique for active listening in discussions with classmates, friends, family or co-workers.
4. **Knowledge can be more easily acquired than skills which must be built by steady practice.** There are important differences between gaining new information and building new skills. The most important difference is that building new skills takes practice. Adult learners should be patient and recognize that classroom instruction needs to be supplemented by constant practice in the course of everyday life. The skills development process must be nurtured. It takes years, not days, or weeks to build skills. The classroom can be a safe place to practice new skills without fear of ridicule or lack of respect. But learners must keep on practicing their new skills outside -- perhaps, first at home with family, then with friends and co-workers, and finally with strangers.
5. **"Learning to learn" competencies include the motivation to learn from all facets of everyday life and the consideration of how classroom learning can be continued at home or at work.** Motivation is the learner's responsibility, but teaching adult learners why and how to extend learning beyond the classroom must be constantly emphasized by ABE and ESL instructors.
6. **Everyone learns best when they have developed a clear idea of why they want to learn and what they want to learn.** Everyone who gets involved in adult learning needs to reflect about exactly what they want to achieve. Formulating an idea of what one wants to learn requires personal reflection but it is always useful to get feedback from others -- friends, classmates, co-workers, family, counselors, and instructors. One's idea of what one wants to learn and why can change as time goes on reflecting one's changing perceptions.
7. **Adult learners should prepare a "lifelong learning plan".** The plan may consist of: a) an overall long-term framework of learning objectives, b) a set of "next steps for learning, and c) the idea of "decision points" at which they will reassess their plans and modify them as seems best. Students should understand that the course in which they are currently enrolled is not an end in itself but one component of an overall process of ongoing learning.
8. **Some elements in learning are to synthesize, contextualize, and organize new information for one's personal use.** Adult learners should be introduced to several basic tools or skills useful for packaging and assimilating new information. These skills include:

taking notes on a presentation, jotting down questions which come to mind to ask a speaker after a presentation, summarizing a discussion or presentation, outlining a discussion or presentation, reviewing a course outline to see how each of the individual lessons fits into a whole curriculum. Students should be introduced to the idea that we all are called upon from time to time to use information in new situations and that good organization of information makes this easier.

9. **A valuable way to solidify new knowledge and strengthen newly-acquired skills is to help others learn.** Instructors can ask and expect that students participate in collaborative learning activities. These can include peer tutoring, work as part of a team, practicing skills by communicating information to family members, co-workers, or neighbors. These “learning by teaching” activities provide a foundation for practicing skills and reinforce the idea that learning requires responsibility and self-management.
10. **Being a responsible participant in the class “community” is an important element of learning.** Being a responsible member of the class means personal and collective accountability for learning. Everyone should participate in the collective decision to emphasize some areas, skip over others and subsequently remain involved in the direction the class takes. Being a responsible member of the class community should also include efforts to not waste class time needlessly, to ask for help when needed, to behave courteously and thoughtfully to classmates, guests, and the instructor, to participate fully in group activities, and to help others whenever possible.
11. **Skills developed through daily experiences are transferable to all of the environments in which we function: family, work, community.** Skills built in the course of managing family life or as part of participating in community affairs can be applied in the workplace and vice versa. The skills needed now and for the 21st century all relate to flexibility and versatility as a means of responding to a constantly-changing and sometimes unpredictable environment.
12. **Adult learners should be aware that they will experience periods when they question their own ability to continue learning.** Instructors can provide their students with valuable support by recognizing crises of self-confidence as normal, and by preparing students to confront these crises when they occur. Students should be made aware that it is common to move forward and then temporarily lose ground or remain static. Students should be encouraged to talk to the teacher if they feel they are having problems. Instructors should be explicit in requiring that students who plan to drop a class, tell them why they are leaving. If they do quit a class (for any reason) students should reflect on what they will do next to continue their learning plan.
13. **Adult learners should be encouraged to reflect after each class or at the end of each day about what new skills they have acquired in the course of the class or during the day.** Students should know that indicators of progress are subtle and that their learning is more effective if they consciously question every day whether they have learned anything and what practical new things they can do as a result of their learning.
14. **“Lifelong learning plans” are always provisional ones.** Good planning means that specific plans will always be modified without losing sight of the overall direction. Lifelong learning plans should be modified to respond to a person’s changing interests, growing awareness of their abilities, reassessment of their aptitudes or aspirations, changing personal circumstances, or new, emerging opportunities.

Sample Learning Activities

1. Have students in the class discuss their previous experiences in adult learning, what they learned and what they have done or think they should have done to build on that beginning.
2. Ask students to reflect on what experiences they may have had of “putting the pieces of the

picture together” when suddenly a whole situation or body of knowledge finally “made sense” to them.

3. Ask each student to talk about who they know, who was not a professional teacher, from whom they most enjoyed learning. What did they learn from the person and why do they think the person was a good teacher?
4. Talk with students about what the ways in which the metaphor of being an “explorer” may apply or not apply to the task of building one’s ability to learn effectively. Themes to address might include: reasons for exploring, rewards, dangers, planning, preparation, partnerships to support expeditions, taking unforeseen opportunities to learn more, learning from guides, the role of scouts.
5. After the presentation of an overview and selected teaching points, ask the class to collectively develop a “Pledge for Responsible Learners” outlining their resolutions as a group to use their time in class wisely, help classmates learn, and extend their learning beyond the classroom. A copy of this pledge can then be made for each student, and enlarged to post in the classroom.
6. Ask students to share their basic reasons for deciding to enroll in the class. Probe each students’ presentation to get an idea of: why they enrolled in the class, what specific skills do they most want to develop, and what they expect to do after the class which is different than before. Compare and contrast individual aspirations and expectations.
7. In a group discussion, develop a chart comparing and contrasting the main features of children’s learning and adults’ learning. Point out that this chart is an example of a “tool” for organizing information.
8. Have students discuss what they think “teamwork” means and how it is related to coaching and learning to be a better athlete or a better learner.
9. Have students who are parents talk about how they approach teaching their children and what they’ve learned about how their children learn.
10. Have each student prepare an individual learning plan specifying; a) what they hope to achieve in the class, b) what they plan to do next to continue the learning they started in class, and c) what their medium-term (1-2 yrs.), and long term (3-10 yrs.) plans are for increasing their knowledge and skills.
11. Work with students to generate lists which distinguish effective learning (i.e. in-depth understanding, solid grasp of information, ability to deploy new skills and information) from efficient learning (i.e. learning rapidly, seizing opportunities to ask questions, seeking out new more easily accessible information sources). What are the tradeoffs between effective and efficient learning?
12. Have students revise their initial personal learning plan to develop an end-of-course plan (revised and refined). Ask students to include in the plan “checkpoints” for reviewing and revising their strategies and learning objectives.
13. Schedule an individual session for each student with a school counselor, or even a qualified volunteer, for discussing their future plans.
14. Ask each student in the class to list the four most important things they have learned in the course of the class about how to learn effectively and efficiently. Combine these individual “learning points” into an overall aggregate of the different kinds of lessons that can be learned about how to learn.
15. Ask each student to prepare a “personal learning tool kit” a list about what they know about

their own learning style and effective learning in general. The list or outline should include at least: a) important points they want to remember about effective learning, b) the main things they know about their own learning style, c) the main areas they need to work on (e.g. practicing skills more, helping others more), d) their personal resolutions for continuing and sustaining their learning progress.

To reinforce the idea of adult learning as a proactive, structured, individual responsibility, combined with a collective responsibility to help co-learners, all students in the class should be asked, as part of the closing session to present a "lifelong learning" plan. These plans need not be overly formal but they should represent a significant commitment on the part of each individual to do "whatever it takes" to achieve their personal learning objectives. If program resources are available, individual learning plans prepared as part of class activities toward the end of the course might be typed and formatted elegantly for presentation at the class closing. Presenting "lifelong learning plans" as a culmination of the class activity convey more accurately than a course completion certificate, the idea that participating in an adult education program is one component of an overall strategy for personal development.

Resources Checklist

- **Integrated Curriculum for Achieving Necessary Skills**, Adult Basic and Literacy Educators Network of Washington, 1995.
This volume is a rich resource for content-related activities, for classroom activities, and for useful instructional strategies. It includes a section specifically on Learning to Learn. The section includes classroom activities and handouts. The organization's phone number is (206) 587-3880.
- **SCANS, Teaching the SCANS Competencies**, U.S. Department of Labor, 1993.
This is one of the key publications which articulate the national SCANS framework which forms the basis of the adult education component of Education Goals 2000. This publication is oriented primarily toward high school instruction but it, nonetheless, is a valuable resource for adult education instructors. The section on assessing students' acquisition of SCANS-linked competencies is particularly valuable. It also has information on some innovative program designs and resources.
- **SCANS, What Work Requires of Schools: A SCANS Report for America 2000**, U.S. Department of Labor, 1991.
This is a short and excellent overview of the SCANS framework.
- Carnevale, Anthony, **Workplace Basics: The Skills Employers Want**, American Society for Training and Development/U.S. Department of Labor, 1991.
This is a short and straightforward review of contemporary skills demands and learning challenges for career advancement.
- Spruck Wrigley, Heide and Guth, Gloria J.A., **Bringing Literacy to Life: Issues and Options in Adult ESL Literacy**, Aguirre International, 1992.
This book is based on a multi-year study for OVAE, U.S. Department of Education. It is a valuable resource for designing a course to maximize students' ability to build their learning ability within the context of an ESL course. It is organized to provide background information, suggestions on "best practices", ideas for activities and issues to reflect on in programs oriented toward lifelong learning.
The publisher's phone number is: (650) 349-1842.
- Kagan, Spencer, **Cooperative Learning**, Kagan Cooperative Learning, California, 1992.

Background Resources

- Smith, Robert M. and Associates, **Learning to Learn Across the Lifespan**, Jossey-Bass,

1990.

- Kissam, Edward and Reder, Stephen, **Responding to Diversity: Strategies for Meeting the Adult Education Needs of Limited English Proficient Adults in California**, Final Report to Adult Education Policy and Planning Unit, California Department of Education, April, 1997.

This report provides an overview of the learning demands placed on limited-English adult learners in California. Chapter 4 outlines how adult education programs can implement a counseling component, beginning with orientation sessions and ending with closing sessions to formulate lifelong learning plans.

- Kissam, Edward, "Reinventing Citizenship Instruction", Inter-American Institute on Migration and Labor, Washington, DC, May, 1994. Available from the author at (650) 513-6224.

Organizational Resources

- ABLE
Adult Basic and Literacy Educators Network
1701 Broadway
Seattle, WA 98122
(206) 587-3880.

This network developed the ICANS materials. It also maintains a resource library. It is likely to be involved in ongoing efforts to support effective teaching of the SCANS framework of skills, including "learning to learn".

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