Elements of an Education Session

As instructors, we don't always think of ourselves as instructional designers, even though we do it all the time! Perhaps you have found yourself in a position where the instructional materials you were provided were not well suited for adult learners as they could be. Or, you found yourself in a position where you had to modify the materials to fit a specific audience. Both examples involve the skill of instructional design.

This section will give you a basic knowledge of the elements of an education session and enable you to recognize and apply basic, effective instructional design methods. Every education session, regardless of the mode, has the same core elements.

OBJECTIVES | THE HOOK | CONTENT | APPLICATION | CLOSING | TAKEAWAY

Objectives - The Why

As mentioned in previous sections, adult learners have different motivations and ways of learning new information. Adult learners want to know the "why" as well as the "how." Why do they need the information or the skill? What will be the reward? How will giving their time impact their job?

Always start your educational session by sharing the "why" or learning objectives of the session. For example, let's say there is a new policy related to how nurses provide wound care. As the instructor, I would begin by sharing we are here because of the new policy and list the specific outcomes or "what will I get out of this." At the end of the session, learners will be able to 1.) Explain the new policy. 2.) Perform a return demonstration of the new wound care technique. 3.) Identify where wound care supplies will be located on the community.

A few tips for creating learning objectives:

- Identify what you want the learners to take away from the session. You can think of it as, "After participating in today's session, learners should be able to…"

- Use an active verb at the beginning of the objective to describe what you want to measure.

- Make the learning objectives simple and clear for all learners.

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Hook - Capture Attention

After you share the why, you will want to gain the attention of the learners. Begin your education session with the hook. The hook is an attention-getting device that you use to help learners engage from the outset. To a large extent, the first few moments of a session determine the outcome and impact level.

The hook should be compelling enough to encourage learners to set aside thinking about other tasks and to focus on the content of the session. If you create engagement at the beginning, learners are likely to try to stay with you throughout the session.

There are many different approaches to the hook, including the following:

- Share an icebreaker
- Complete a brief activity
- Tell a story
- Role-play a scenario
- Use a quote and discuss
- Show a statistic
- Ask hypothetical or open-ended questions

Content - Anchor to Work

The content represents the information you would like to share or elicit from the learners. With adult learners, you will encounter unique expectations, demands, and challenges. The key is to make accommodations where possible and design sessions in a manner that is most effective and engaging for the learners.

When designing your session, you will want to anchor, or connect, the topic you're teaching to the learner's experience. This ensures relevancy for your learners and begins to indicate to them why this information is important to them right now. The more the learners see how the new information is relevant to their work, the more likely they will be motivated to learn.

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Application - Try it Out

Adult learners tend to have a low tolerance for sitting and listening. As aneducator, you can reinforce learned content through application. For example, case scenarios and role plays can be used in a variety of ways to encourage problem solving and to practice new skills. Adults learn best when learning activities are varied to account for the different learning styles.

Some tasks and skills lend themselves to interaction more easily than others, so you may have to be creative or consider having a co-presenter. See below for some application ideas:

- Encourage/ use questions and provide answers
- Facilitate large or small group discussion
- Involve learners in a brainstorming activity
- Role-play a scenario or simulation
- Illustrate with a case study
- Create learning stations or skills fair

Remember to tap into the experiences of your adult learners to help you introduce interactivity!

Closing - What was Learned

Learning is enhanced if learners are given a chance to reflect, review, and personally relate to the material.

Some examples of closing activities include:

- Review – Revisit the class learning objectives
- Summary – Ask learners to summarize what they have learned or share their key takeaway
- Explore Confusion – Ask learners where they may still have points of confusion. Ask questions and provide answers as necessary.
- Preview – If there will be additional sessions on the same topic, you can begin to prep learners for what will happen next. For example, if you are providing instruction on a new policy, you can share with the learners when the policy will go into effect. If you are teaching a systems review and you started with cardiovascular, prepare the group by sharing the next system for review and the anticipated session dates.

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Takeaway - Provide a Visual

A takeaway provides your learners the opportunity to reflect and review key messages from the education session. Handouts are especially useful if your presentation was highly technical, complex, or contained many concepts.

When providing a takeaway, think of it as an extension of your education session. Pay attention to the quality and design of the handout. Avoid putting so much information on a single page that your handout begins to look like a textbook.

Use simple, readable font type. Organize and break out dense information into images, tables, or other illustrations, following the same design rules you did in preparing your PowerPoint slides. Create consistency by using the same images, colors, and font type as well. Make the handout appealing to the eye and able to be understood at a glance.