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FIVE ADULT LEARNING FORMATS

One of the challenges for adult educators is that of selecting an educational format which suits the needs and aspirations of the particular group of learners in question. In addition to the needs of learners, the adult educator also has to bear in mind the nature of the material to be learned - which may range from ideas and information to behaviors and performances to values and attitudes.

My efforts in in-service education for teachers and human service workers have convinced me that the educational format used to meet a particular educational need is often chosen in a haphazard fashion, with neither the presenter nor the participants clearly understanding which format should be chosen to best meet the needs of the learners while taking into account the topic to be learned.

There are at least five formats which are variously used in in-service education. They are, in order of descending formality:

1. Lecture
2. Seminar
3. Symposium
4. Clinic
5. Workshop

In addition to choice of format, a further consideration is the learning style which is desired. The three learning styles which are common for adult learners are: cognitive, vicarious, and experiential.

Cognitive learning refers to the learning of concepts, ideas, information and principles. This is the type of learning commonly associated with academic or classroom learning. Listening, reading, note-taking, questioning and writing are activities usually carried on in support of cognitive learning.

Vicarious learning is learning through observation, mental rehearsal, speculation, and imagining how what one hears, sees and knows affects one's learning self. The individual who seldom takes an active part in group discussion yet claims that he "learns a lot" through watching and listening, is testifying to the importance of vicarious learning.

Experiential learning is "learning by doing". Here the emphasis is upon practice, involvement, interaction, give and take, and benefiting from direct experience. Common experiential learning activities include role-playing, supervised practice, simulation, case-study, demonstration, discussion, modelling, trying-out, apprenticing and mutual effort.

The following table summarizes the special features, goals, activities, learning styles of the five educational formats. It is my hope that the format descriptions can serve as guidelines for matching format with learner need and topic.

FIVE EDUCATIONAL FORMATS FOR ADULT LEARNERS

NAME	SPECIAL FEATURE	GOALS	ACTIVITIES	LEARNING MODE	EXAMPLE
<u>LECTURE</u>	Expert impact via ideas and information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ to preserving knowledge ✓ to transmit ideas, information ✓ to inspire, persuade 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ pre-reading ✓ talking, listening note-taking 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ cognitive ✓ vicarious 	expert explains various methods of evaluating pupil achievement in language arts
<u>SEMINAR</u>	critical, detailed examination of study material under expert guidance.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ to develop knowledge ✓ to acquire concepts ✓ to examine research ✓ to rationalize positions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ pre-reading ✓ presentation of leader-prepared paper ✓ presentation of participant-prepared papers ✓ discussion of presentations ✓ note-taking, questioning ✓ develop evidence, arguments, position statements. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ cognitive ✓ vicarious 	Seminar to consider the pros and cons of adopting a new curriculum
<u>SYMPOSIUM</u>	Exposure to wide range of information and ideas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ to inform ✓ to increase awareness ✓ to analyze issues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ pre-reading ✓ lecture ✓ question/discussion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ cognitive ✓ vicarious 	group of experts on outdoor education followed by questions and discussion
<u>CLINIC</u>	Expert impact combined with experiential learning methods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ to diagnose and analyze problems ✓ to demonstrate specific procedures ✓ to provide individual consultation or individualized instructions ✓ to improve special performances or problems 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ participant-leader interaction ✓ demonstration-imitation ✓ simulation ✓ case-study ✓ performance analysis ✓ discussion ✓ practice by doing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ cognitive ✓ experiential ✓ vicarious 	clinic on PE activities or clinic on counselling skills
<u>WORKSHOP</u>	High degree of experiential learning. Participants have say <u>in what they learn as well as how.</u> Action-oriented.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ to develop skills ✓ to learn procedures ✓ to analyze problems ✓ to plan ✓ to evaluate ✓ to translate theory into practice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ pre-reading ✓ lecturette ✓ demonstration ✓ small-group discussion ✓ problem-solving procedures ✓ individual consultation ✓ role-play ✓ simulation ✓ modeling ✓ practice by doing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ experiential ✓ vicarious ✓ cognitive 	Workshop on discipline methods or on methods of teaching math or on school-community relations