



Understanding Learning

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this unit the learner will be able to:

- ✓ Demonstrate understanding of learning styles and how to accommodate all four learning styles in the classroom

Understanding Learning

The Trainer's Role

Learning occurs everywhere in organizations, wherever employees face problems, deal with unforeseen issues, incorporate new systems and tools, or maneuver their way around obstacles to get their work done.

Learning can happen in two ways. **In classrooms and in many training programs**, teachers are responsible for evaluating curriculum and then determining the content they present. They impart this information to those who are there to learn.

In a more **self-directed type of learning**, the learner has responsibility for his or her own learning and determines what they want to learn. The teacher is more of a facilitator.

Test Your Knowledge

What implications does this have for those of us who have a training role in or for organizations?

Case Study

Susan, a human resource manager, knew she was uncomfortable around people she did not know, or if she did not have business to conduct. She found small talk really stressful because she never knew what to say. She enjoyed working with people at her job and couldn't understand why she felt this way until she had the opportunity to complete a temperament assessment. Learning that she was a strong introvert helped her find techniques to overcome her initial discomfort in informal situations.

Test Your Knowledge

Personal Skill Identification

Based on your own experience, identify what you feel are the top five skills required to be a top-notch trainer.

Describe how you feel people can acquire those skills.

Competencies for Adult Educators

Questionnaire

Fill out the questionnaire below.

- Place an “R” at each competency required for performing the role you are in or are preparing for.
- Place a “P” at those competencies you have now.

Competency Questionnaire

	Description	R/P
1.	Ability to describe an average adult learner in terms of needs, interests, motivation, capabilities, and developmental characteristics, and to apply that information to training.	

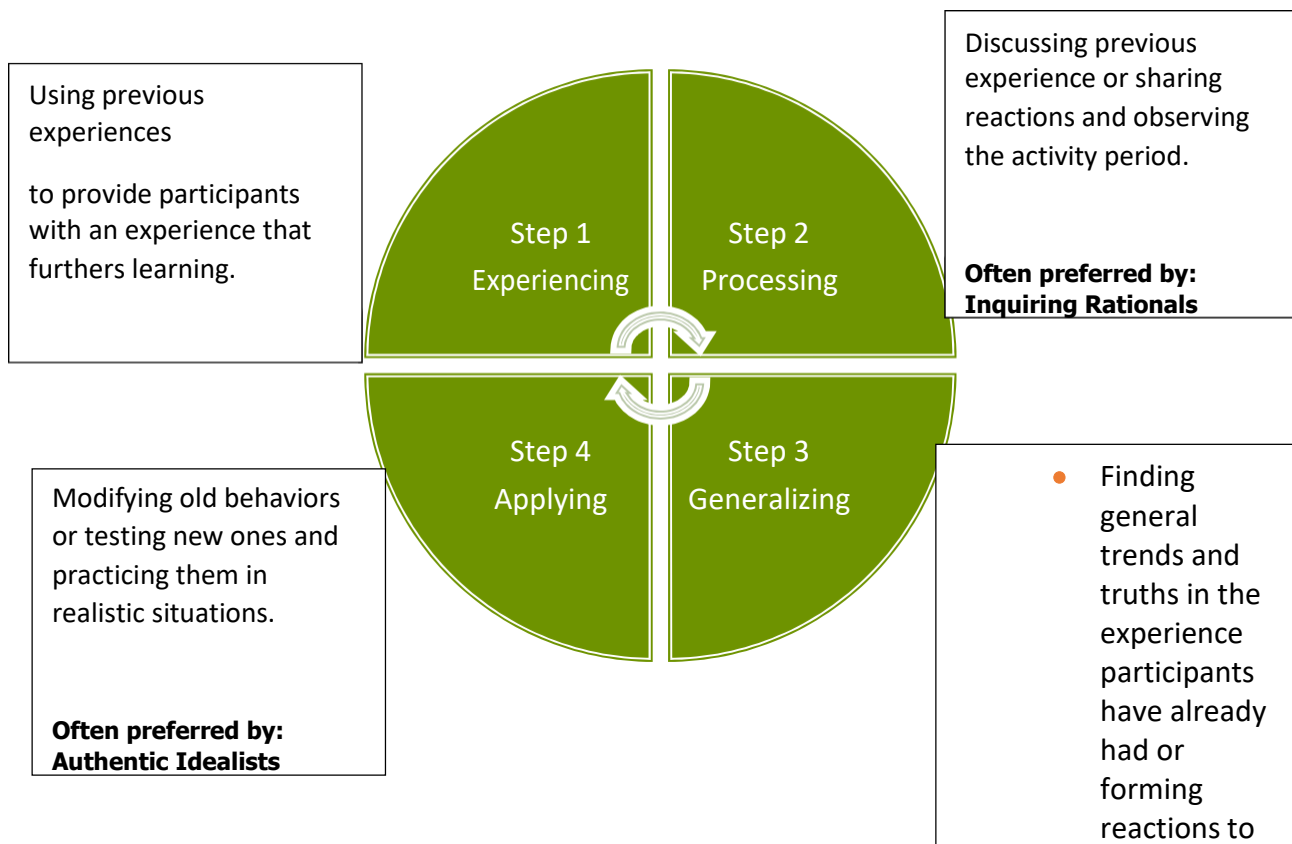
	Description	R/P
2.	Ability to describe the difference and similarities between children as learners and adult learners, and the implications of these differences for teaching and learning.	
3.	Ability to assess the effects on learning that external forces such as groups, organizations, and communities can have on learners.	
4.	Ability to describe the four stages of adult learning and to assess the impact they may have on particular adult learning situations.	
5.	Ability to conceptualize and explain the role of teacher, facilitator, and instructor.	
6.	Ability to feel comfortable in the combined roles of trainer, teacher, facilitator, and instructor.	
7.	Ability to establish a warm, mutually respectful, facilitative relationship with learners.	
8.	Ability to create a physical and psychological climate of comfort, interactivity, openness, and trust.	
9.	Ability to engage learners to take on the responsibility for self-diagnosis of needs for learning.	
10.	Ability to engage learners in participating, sharing, and exchanging viewpoints, sharing responsibilities and decision-making with them as appropriate.	
11.	Knowledge of the rationales for selecting a variety of materials, methods, and techniques for achieving particular learning objectives.	
12.	Skill in using a broad range of materials, methods, and techniques and in inventing techniques to fit new situations.	
13.	Ability to involve learners (when appropriate) in planning, conducting, and evaluating learning activities.	
14.	Ability to accept feedback from learners and apply that feedback to create more meaningful learning opportunities for them.	
15.	Ability to use small group processes effectively.	

Accommodating Learning Preferences

The Learning Process

While adults learn continually, they also demonstrate clear preferences about *how* they learn. Theorists have been considering how people learn since we started teaching people to read and write, and sometimes we do better with education than at other times. We like the work pioneered by **David Kolb**, who founded Experience Based Learning Systems and pioneered an Experiential Learning Cycle to reflect the way adults learn.

We have enhanced that knowledge with what we have learned about temperament and the rapid, demanding, always evolving environments we find ourselves working in. While it may be tempting to try, the Experiential Learning Cycle cannot be changed simply because an individual prefers one particular approach to learning or training. If effective, lasting learning is to occur, the entire cycle must be completed. What you will notice is that the learner will find themselves more comfortable (or engaged) in some activities than others. They are at their peak when they are operating within their comfort zone:



However, as we introduce a new teaching point, we also want to bring the participants on board with us, so we suggest an additional two steps before you start the four learning steps: Orientation and Objectives/Agenda.

For example, let's say you want to teach people how to use a planner to schedule their daily activities.

Orientation

Do a little warm up to the idea of using a planner. You could ask how many people in the room use a planner. Do they prefer paper or electronic? How many buy them or have one or more electronic versions, but then never use them? Ask how many people just use their planner to keep track of meetings.

Objectives and Agenda

Explain that the objective is to use any planner effectively. We will work with a sample planner, and then develop some guidelines for selecting and using a planner.

There is a rule of thumb we can use when we are getting started at scheduling. If a task will take less than 30 minutes, do it. If the task takes more than 30 minutes, schedule it.

First Stage of Learning: Experiencing

Now you are ready to take the group through an experiential stage of learning: an exercise on using that planner. Give each person two pages from a planner: a month-at-a-glance page and a daily page. (Typically you would use the current month or an upcoming month and a day in the next week.) As they work on the Month at a Glance, ask them to fill in important family dates, personal healthcare or development days, any meetings they know they will be attending, and any tasks that must be done, keeping in mind, "If the task takes more than 30 minutes, schedule it."

Then, we'll move onto the daily page: their day, as they know it to be. We suggest using the next day they are back at work. Are there established routines they will follow, such as checking e-mails? Are there activities or jobs that must be done? How long will each job take? Are there people they must call? That daily page usually has room for scheduling, as well as your to-do list and the people you must contact. This can be documentation for what you do: a good enough reason in and of itself to justify using a planner.

Second Stage of Learning: Processing

Give people some opportunity to think about what they have just experienced and jot down some notes on what worked/what didn't work for them. This can be a reflection exercise and a way for them to think about what else they need to learn.

Third Stage of Learning: Generalizing

Now ask them to share their thoughts with two to three others in a small group and suggest some guidelines for the type of planner that will work best, or some guidelines you have found helpful for using a planner.

Fourth Stage of Learning: Applying

In this example, and in many other teaching points, application will not occur until they are back in their own workplace. However, an application for our example might be buying a planner. If people working through the exercise already have a planner or use a software programme, the application would be using it effectively.

Test Your Knowledge

Preparing a Plan

Our Teaching Point

Introduction or orientation

Objectives and agenda

Concrete experiential activity that begins the learning process

Processing

Generalizing

Application

Learning Styles

The Authentic Idealist Learning Style

As an Authentic Idealist, you are probably best at the **Experiencing** and **Processing** steps in the Experiential Learning Cycle. You probably have the ability to view situations from many perspectives. For example, you may enjoy brainstorming and small group discussions. You also like to gather information and probably have broad interests.

To increase your learning power, you need to place emphasis on the Generalizing and Applying phases in the learning process. This means forming conclusions from your information, planning the application of these conclusions, and actually implementing them.

For example, after watching a role play or listening to a discussion, summarize your observations into clear conclusions. Then decide how and when to test these conclusions in your own situations. Establish criteria to evaluate if the new idea really worked. Do this at the end of every activity in which you are an observer.

To further increase your learning power, take a more active role in the workshop than you might normally choose. Volunteer to be in the role plays, or to lead group discussions. This may be uncomfortable at first, but it will give you an opportunity to experiment with your ideas.

You may find it useful to **discuss these topics with** someone who has a Resourceful Artisan learning style. This person will help you see possible conclusions and applications you might overlook. In turn, you may help them see information they might overlook, and develop more perspective.

You may have a tendency to concentrate on the human side of problems or topics or exercises. This reflects your ability to understand or to empathize with others' feelings or points of view, but you may also have a tendency to avoid drawing conclusions about the quantitative or technical aspects of the situation.

Try to develop these skills:

- Collecting and analyzing numerical data.
- Looking for overall patterns in any feedback you get.
- Putting your own feelings aside for a moment and taking a more objective look.

The Inquiring Rational Learning Style

You are best at using the **Experiencing** and **Generalizing** steps in the learning process. If this is your style, you have the ability to create theoretical models (ideas that predict outcomes and descriptions of how different factors interact). You most likely enjoy inductive reasoning and distilling disparate observations into logical explanations.

To increase your learning power, you need to place more emphasis on the Applying and Experiencing phases in the learning process. This involves speeding up your learning cycle by moving into action sooner. For example, after watching a role play or listening to a discussion, think about ways to immediately apply your conclusions. Look for opportunities to test your new idea during the workshop and personally experience the results. This may require you to conceptualize smaller scale experiments, not the large scale efforts you may prefer.

To further increase your learning, be more aware of the feelings and reactions of individuals (including yourself). You may have a tendency to discount intuitive or emotional information. However, much can be learned from a person's tone of voice, facial expressions, and other body language. Much of this data is preliminary in nature and hard to analyze in a logical fashion, but it provides an early indication about how things are going or if an idea has been understood.

You may have a preference for examining the quantitative or factual aspects of a situation. Your conclusions may be based primarily on policies, official relations, or formulas developed in other situations. This can cause you to be over-cautious about experimenting and miss opportunities for learning or taking risks. Since no two situations are exactly alike, try to put more effort into trying ideas, skills, or concepts. Your ability to deal with non-quantitative data will increase if you get involved in interpersonal activities (such as role plays, simulations, and discussions) more frequently. Take an active role and express your feelings. Others will do the same and this will give you experience handling this new form of data. **Enter into discussions with** people whose primary learning style is the Organized Guardian. Note the value they place on intuition as a decision-making device and how effective this can be.

Try to add these learning skills:

- Seeking and exploring possibilities
- Influencing others
- Being personally involved
- Dealing with the people side of issues you work on, particularly how to get the support of key individuals whose help you will need

The Resourceful Artisan Learning Style

You are best at using the **Generalization** and **Application** steps in the learning process. If this is your style, you have the ability to find practical application for ideas, concepts, and theories. In particular, you enjoy situations in which there is a single of best answer to a question or problem. You may usually assume that there is one best answer and use technical analysis to reveal it.

To increase your learning power, you need to place even more emphasis on the Experiencing and Processing steps in the learning process. This means placing a higher value on gathering and understanding non-quantitative information by looking at a situation from different perspectives. The

result may seem to slow your learning process, but it will actually speed things up as you focus on learning the most important things.

For example, while watching a role play or listening to a lecture, you may be thinking about how the topic or technique applies to your situation. Before making a decision, however, try to get other people's perspectives. Listen to their ideas, comments, and questions. You may discover that the situation has elements you weren't considering. This may influence how you apply your learning.

To further increase your learning, try to take a less active role in the workshop than you might usually take. Spend some time really listening to others' ideas. Try to see the world as they see it and to understand their feelings and values. Play an observer role from time to time and avoid making judgments or decisions about how well others are doing. Instead, try to understand why they are saying or doing something. This may lead you to new and useful information.

You will find it important to **discuss workshop topics with** someone who has an Authentic Idealist learning style. This person will see both questions and possibilities you might tend to ignore or avoid. You may help them see how to apply some of their ideas.

Try to add these skills:

- Listening with an open mind
- Gathering information
- Imagining the implications of situations

The Organized Guardian Learning Style

You are best at using the **Applying** and **Experiencing** steps in the learning process. If this is your style, you have the ability to learn primarily from hands-on experience. You probably enjoy carrying out plans and involving yourself in new and challenging experiences.

Your tendency may be to act on intuition and gut feel rather than careful analysis. When a thoughtful approach does not seem to be working out, you will be quick to discard it and improvise.

To increase your learning power, you need to place even more emphasis on the Processing and Generalizing steps in the learning process. This means collecting and analyzing more information about the results of your efforts. Your batting average in the trial and error method of learning will increase if you learn more than you currently do from each of your trials.

For example, when watching a role play, you may feel frustrated and prefer to be doing the plan yourself. Your tendency might be to think of how you would do the same activity better than the people doing it. However, to develop your Processing and Generalizing skills, you should examine other, less personal aspects of the situation.

Here are questions you might ask:

- What basic point does the exercise prove or disprove?
- What other information aside from your personal experience do you have that relates to the same topic?
- Does this exercise help you understand why certain techniques work (not just what the techniques are or how to use them)?

To further increase your learning power, try to take a less physically active part in the workshop than you might normally choose. Be more mentally active. Volunteer to be an observer in some exercises, not a doer. This will give you an opportunity to reflect on other people's experiences and learn from their trial and error.

You will find it useful to **discuss workshop topics with** someone who has an Inquiring Rational learning style. This person will help you see information you might otherwise miss. They will also help you see the hidden logic and patterns in situations. You can often use this perspective to guide your intuition. In turn, you can help them see new possibilities and opportunities to try out their ideas.

You may have a tendency to concentrate on the urgent aspects of a situation, favoring immediate utility over long-term understanding. To increase your learning, keep notes on your experiences, analyze them, and look for patterns. In other words, look for the forest as well as the trees. Take more time to get other people's perspective on what has happened (or what you are about to do) during the workshop.

The particular skills you want to add are:

- Organizing information
- Building conceptual models
- Testing theories and ideas

Further Reading:

