

PRINCIPLES OF ADULT LEARNING

Learning defined

The target groups for training in precursor control would necessarily be adults, with varying degree of experience in law enforcement. It would be worthwhile for a precursor control trainer, therefore, to possess conceptual clarity about learning, particularly adult learning, for it is recognised that training encompasses learning. The Glossary of Training Terms defines learning as:

"The process whereby individuals acquire knowledge, skills and attitudes through experience, reflection, study or instruction".

Learning has also been defined as a *relatively permanent change in behaviour* resulting from instruction or stimulation from external sources, from one's own practical experiences and from insight arising from reflection.

Training is, therefore, nothing but organised learning, with a well-defined purpose. Formal educational institutions in modern society when initially established, were governed only by one model of assumption about learners and learning - the pedagogical model (derived from the Greek words "paidos", meaning "child" and "agogos", meaning "leader". So, pedagogy literally means "the art and science of teaching children".)

Such a model assigned full responsibility for making all decisions about what should be learned, how it should be learned, when it should be learned, and if it had been learnt, to the teacher. Students were submissive recipients. It assumed that they were dependent personalities and were motivated by extrinsic pressures or rewards.

Adult learning

The first inkling that the pedagogical model may not be appropriate for adults appeared in a book by Eduard C. Lindeman, "The Meaning of Adult Education", in 1926. According to Lindeman adults were not just grown-up children, that they learned best when they were actively involved in determining what, how, and when they learned.³ This growing body of knowledge about adult learners was labelled

³ Knowles, (p.169)

andragogy. It was initially used to mean "the art and science of helping adults learn". It is a term that is now widely used around the world as an alternative to pedagogy.⁴

The pedagogy and andragogy models have a number of implications for trainers. One basic implication is the importance of making a clear distinction between a content plan and a process design.⁵ What does this distinction signify? It highlights that the process is more important than the content. Thus, how it is taught is relatively more important than what is being taught.

Factors influencing the learning process

The factors that influence the learning process are: -

- ◆ *Need* is a great motivator. Training should meet the training needs of the learner.
- ◆ *Meaningful associations* between new material to be learnt and the more familiar, facilitates learning. In other words, learning proceeds smoothly, if we move from the *Known* to the *Unknown*.
- ◆ The inputs should be sequenced in a manner that it proceeds from the *simple to the complex*.
- ◆ Learning is an active and voluntary process. *Involvement enhances learning*, as it inspires the learner to learn.
- ◆ Enough time must be allowed for *practising the learning* during the training programme itself for assimilation, testing, acceptance and internalisation.
- ◆ *Success is a great motivator*. Hence, learning is facilitated by knowledge of results, i.e., feedback, given to the trainee on his learning. The feedback should be immediate.
- ◆ *Law of intensity*. A vivid, dramatic and exciting learning experience is more likely to be remembered.

Role of the trainer

The trainer has a significant role to play in facilitating the learning process and, to play it effectively, he/she should take into consideration the following factors:

- ◆ The adult learner is a self-directing person. In order to motivate him to learn, say, precursor control, it should be put across to him in a way that is meaningful and relevant to him.

⁴ Knowles, (p.169)

⁵ Knowles, (p.173)

- ◆ Life experiences are important to an adult. Case studies, therefore, would be very effective in teaching precursor control. If a good case is discussed starting from how the enforcement officers received the information and the audience is taken through the various stages of investigation, it makes the entire subject come to life and the participants remember it for a long time to come.

It should be accepted that all persons, irrespective of age, can learn. There are always, newer and newer challenges emerging in all fields including drug law enforcement and everyone, regardless of age or rank in their hierarchy, can learn from specialists in different fields.

The trainer should know the trainees and learn more about them during the learning process. It helps to know the background of participants and their knowledge of the subject before starting the training session. This helps one to determine the right approach to start and the extent of details that need to be covered.

Be aware of the learning processes and motivate the trainees. The trainer should carefully observe the reactions of the trainees- whether verbal or non-verbal. This provides clues as to how far the trainees are absorbing the subject and whether they are motivated to learn.

Ways of learning

An important underlying consideration is the way in which people learn. It is recognised that there are at least four ways in which people learn:

- ◆ **Trial and error** - by trying for oneself.
- ◆ **Being told** - by receiving direct instruction, either orally, or in writing.
- ◆ **Imitation** - by copying the actions of another person, usually an instructor or a skilled person.
- ◆ **Thinking** - by organising one's thoughts about a topic or problem to arrive at an explanation or solution.

Since the trainer plays a vital role in implementing the training programme, he should necessarily understand these basic concepts of the learning process. Another important concept, "**Learning Unit**" [LU],⁶ will be discussed in the next chapter.

⁶ Adapted from the Readings on Direct Trainer's Skills Course of the Department of Personnel & Training [Training Division], Government of India.

THE LEARNING UNIT

Learning unit defined

Learning Unit is a formulation that facilitates change, a change that will result in the trainee being able to do something he or she could not do before going through the Learning Unit. In other words, Learning Unit facilitates 'change in behaviour'.

The Learning Unit can be depicted graphically as in Fig. 4

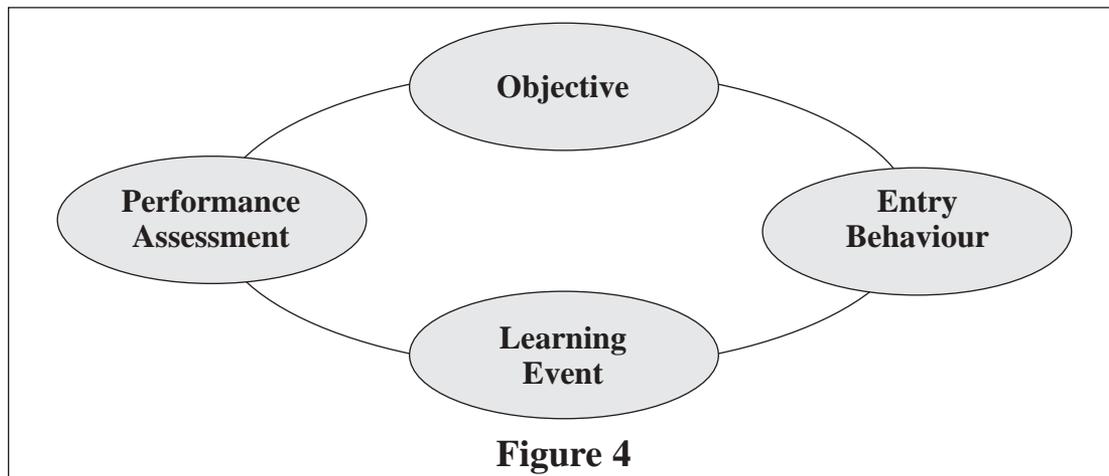


Figure 4

The model shown above in Fig. 4 has four principal stages. These stages are arranged in a circular format to show that they are interrelated. For example:

Establish a clear purpose (e.g. the need to learn how to perform a task) and express as an objective. The starting point for developing the Learning Unit is, therefore, the **objective**.

There is a trainee or a group of trainees to train. Their present capabilities are termed as **entry behaviour**.

In the light of objectives set and the Entry Behaviour of the trainees, the **learning event** is designed. The purpose is to enable trainees to achieve the training objectives.

The trainer, the trainees and the management might like to assess whether the objectives have been achieved. This stage is earmarked for **performance assessment**.

Entry behaviour

Participants come for training because there is a perceptible need to change, i.e., desired change, which will lead to improved performance. The training objective

spells out what and how much change is required and in which direction. In order to bring about the change, one should, in the first place, understand where the trainees stand before the training. Hence specifically, before training takes place, it is important that:

- ◆ The trainee should know he or she has a training need to perform a task effectively.
- ◆ A standard of performance is available to define what the trainee should be able to do.
- ◆ Finally, and most important, the trainee must want to change - to acquire new knowledge, skills or attitudes to enable the task to be performed to the required standard.

We can categorise this body of knowledge as '**Entry Behaviour**', i.e., having an idea about the trainees, his/her background, etc.

Structuring learning event

The next stage is structuring the learning event to solve the trainee's performance problems. The intention is that the trainees, after going through the learning event, should display a change in behaviour. If it is to be successful, it must:

- ◆ Do what it purports to do - change a trainee's behaviour.
- ◆ Treat all trainee's participating in the learning event as individuals: recognise differences in their knowledge, skills and attitudes.
- ◆ Provide sufficient time for each individual to achieve success.
- ◆ Create a learning environment that is pleasant, well organised, free from anxiety and where the trainee will be willing to participate in learning activities designed to bring about the required change(s) in behaviour at work.

Assessment

Once the trainee completes the learning event, it is important that the change is assessed. This can be assessed by:

- ◆ Determining whether the trainee has acquired the proposed knowledge, skills and attitudes.
- ◆ Determining whether the trainee is now able to perform the task, as per the specified standard.
- ◆ Asking the trainee to comment on the value of the newly acquired expertise in relation to performance of the task and to his or her job in general.