

Teaching as a Volunteer Leader

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Extension Home Economics

Teaching adults is challenging. But the benefits and rewards that you receive as a volunteer teacher are many. Teaching is an opportunity to enhance your own personal growth, to learn more about a wide range of subjects, to gain valuable skills in public speaking, to meet and enjoy new people, and to improve your own self-esteem and feeling of worth.

Volunteer teachers are important and necessary to nearly all community organizations. For most adults, learning is a life-long pursuit. Education doesn't end on graduation day; nor is there a single designated "teacher." Adults can be both teacher and learner in a complex process that involves our mind, values, experiences, emotions and interests.

Adults and youth vary in their learning needs. Recognizing unique characteristics of adult learners, creating a positive learning environment, and considering strategies for how adults learn will make volunteering to teach rewarding for both learner and teacher.

Adult Learners

Teachers are concerned with how people learn and remember. Some characteristics of adult learners that make them different from youth are:

- Adults are independent, and resist change.
- Adults have a greater fear of failure.
- Adults are capable of being both learner and teacher.
- Adults are more likely to have problems with seeing or hearing.

Some adult learners have been away from structured learning experiences for many years and may doubt their ability to learn. A teacher of adults should keep these characteristics in mind when preparing and presenting a lesson.

The Learning Environment

As a volunteer teacher, or leader, your appearance, attitude and enthusiasm are contagious. Being interested and willing to help, and by creating an environment that is comfortable and secure, you can help the adult learner feel at ease and able to learn. Both teacher and learner will benefit from a well-

planned lesson that is presented in an environment prepared for learning.

The physical setting is important. Arrive early, if possible. Check on the temperature of the room, seating arrangements and lighting. As the teacher, be prepared to change the physical setting when necessary and possible to best suit all the learners. Having the room and equipment ready for

learning is a must.

The degree of learner involvement is determined right from the beginning of the lesson. It is crucial that the teacher's attitude about teaching be positive from the start. If you don't feel well, never smile, are critical of the material, and question the value of the lesson, your effectiveness as a teacher and the positive learning setting are diminished.

Finally, demonstrate enthusiasm! Genuine enthusiasm can be nurtured through constantly searching for new and relevant ideas and material. If you believe what you are teaching is meaningful and worthwhile, your learners will sense your enthusiasm. If learners arrive in an atmosphere of enthusiasm and are encouraged to talk and to contribute to the whole group, you will have facilitated learning by setting up the expectation that it is *their* group, and that each person has an investment in making it work.



Strategies for Teaching Adults

Learning which provides alternatives to present problems confronting adults is effective. Adult learners have limited time and numerous experiences which offer a challenge to the volunteer teacher.

About 85 percent of learning occurs through vision. This includes reading, seeing, demonstrations, seeing pictures and drawings, and observing daily life. About 10 percent of learning occurs through hearing. This includes lectures and public speaking, hearing instructions on how to do something, and listening to everyday happenings. The other senses account for the remainder.

When deciding on an appropriate teaching method to use, keep in mind that adults remember more when they actively participate in the learning process. When teaching adults, the responsibility for learning is shared. The adult teacher should facilitate learning, inspire and encourage learners, and assist learners in achieving the goals they have set for themselves.

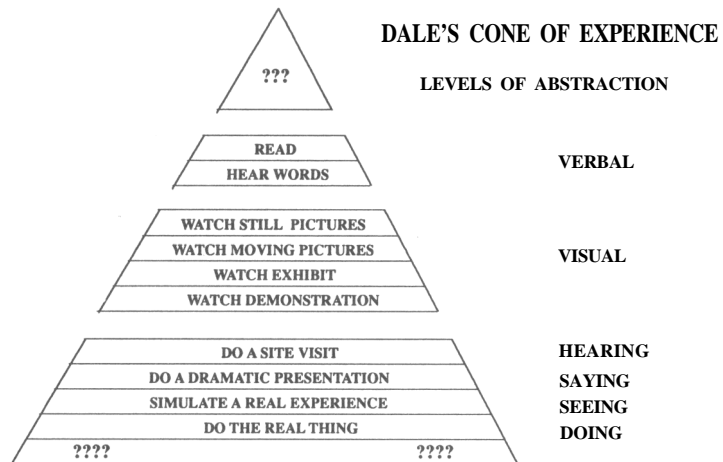
To best facilitate adult learning, consider the following strategies for how adults learn.

- A supportive, people-centered climate encourages adults to share experiences and knowledge.

- Adults want to explore what they have identified as important rather than what the teacher views as important.

- Adults want to learn information relevant to their needs.

- Adults are busy. Their time is limited. Design lessons so they can learn at their own pace.



- Adults prefer a variety of teaching methods.

- Adults will decide to participate or not to participate in a learning experience.

Understanding the unique difference in adult learners will help improve your effectiveness and pleasure in teaching them. The success of a learning situation depends upon how well the teacher accomplishes the goals and meets the learners' needs and expectations. An evaluation tool which reflects the goals is recommended. The evaluation can help you improve your presentation skills and provide you with suggestions for additional lessons.

*Tell me, I hear
Show me, I remember
Involve me, I understand*

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Cooperative Extension Service, Manhattan, Kansas

Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension Work, acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, as amended. Kansas State University, County Extension Councils, and United States Department of Agriculture Cooperating. Walter R. Woods, Director. All educational programs and materials available without discrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, age, or handicap.

October 1990 - New

File Code: Home Economics-5; 10-90—15M