

Adult Learning Interview Transcript

Opening:

Sheila – Thank you both for agreeing to be on the design team to develop the upcoming Adult Learning seminar! We want new Instructors to be able to develop and deliver effective instruction for adult learners. Let me tell you just a little bit about the project. In order for us to be able to offer this training to more people and have it available whenever its needed, we are going to deliver it via a facilitated webinar/seminar.

The webinar is going to be recorded for the Knowledge and Resource Center, the KRC which is housed at BLM’s National Training Center site and that will be for individuals who couldn’t participate in the initial training, and it will also be a handy just-in-time reference for those who would like to have a refresher.

Maureen – Well, there is so much to consider when you’re developing training for adults. So, where do you think we should start?

Adult Learner Preferences:

Carol – Well, you know one of the things I’ve found especially important for adult learners is to make sure that we incorporate different learning preferences or learning styles into the lesson.

Sheila – That is so true. We’ll need to do that and I think along with that we need to explain why learning preferences matter.

Carol – That’s a good point, but I think we can boil down those reasons to these:

1. To appreciate the different ways that we learn (ourselves and others)
2. To recognize the strengths and pitfalls of different learning styles
3. To be able to reach diverse learning styles
4. And probably most important, to provide learning that educates and engages

Sheila – Well, I think that’s good...so, based on that then, what do you think are some specific things we should mention about learning styles in this training?

Maureen – Well, one of the best known learning style models was created by David Kolb, and I think you know, you’re both familiar with him. He felt that individual learning styles should be taken into account when developing training for adults.

And basically he divided people into four experiential learning groups and these were the Convergengers; the Divergers; the Assimilators and the Accommodators. And for a minute, let’s just think about a few of the characteristics that we really should point out.

First of all, the Convergengers learn by testing theories and applying common sense. They like hands on activities where they can use their technical skills. They are more often pragmatists and they value strategic thinking. A strength of this type of learner is their practical application of ideas so they put

practice onto theory, and areas though for them to work on are team-work and flexibility. Their favorite question is “How does this work?”

And another learning type is the Diverger. Now the Diverger learns by listening and sharing ideas. They value insight thinking and they work for harmony. They tend to be very creative and they grasp the big picture. They are imaginative and they can be the visionaries in an organization, and today we really do need a lot of those people. Now a strength of this learner is innovation and ideas. However, they can become fearful under pressure and sometimes they lack daring. Their favorite question is “Why?”

Carol – Well you know, I brought my Learning Styles reference book and here’s some characteristics about the two other types; the Assimilators and the Accommodators.

The Assimilators really have the ability to come up with theoretical concepts and models themselves. They think things through very thoroughly. They are far more interested in ideas than in people, and that can sometimes make them (seem) a little dominating which can discourage creativity from others. Their favorite question would be “What?”

The Accommodators on the other hand, integrate experience and application. They really learn by trial-and-error. They’re very enthusiastic about new things – they even relish change. They are action oriented and they get the job done. They put theory into practice. Their favorite question would probably be “If?”

Sheila – Mmm. I think its important then, we definitely want to include Kolb’s information on experiential learning preferences. It sounds like something we want to include in our training when we talk about different types of learners.

Sheila (cont) - I’m also wondering ... what do you think about this, people talk a lot about either being an Extrovert or an Introvert, which comes out of the Myers Briggs Type Indicator survey. Do you think a person’s Myers Briggs Type Indicator type has an influence on adult learning styles?

Maureen – I do.

Carol – Yeah, I do too. I personally think that (personality) types can really influence how people prefer to interact and how they prefer to learn new information. As well as how they process that information and how they act on it.

In addition to Extroversion and Introversion, there’s really three more combinations of preferences. Taking a look first at Extroversion vs. Introversion; that talks about how you get energized; how you interact with other people.

Extroverts tend to think out loud; they are very social people, they’re energized by being with other people; they consider the breadth of an idea or concept.

Introverts on the other hand prefer to develop their thoughts before they share them; they really focus on the depth of an idea or a concept; they reflect, and then they act.

Sheila – I’ve always been intrigued by the comparison between the Sensing and Intuitive preferences and how they each prefer to gather information, and that may be because of how I act on, or don’t act on, my own intuition. And ahh, so here’s what I remember about them;

Those who have a high Sensing preference for gathering information rely on the five senses - that would be seeing, hearing, smelling, touching and tasting; they are very detailed, they have a routine, they are specific and they are very practical minded.

Whereas the people with an Intuitive preference make connections and cognitive leaps based on data – they act on their hunches and they like variety and change when they’re gathering information.

Maureen – Mmm. And then there is the preference on how you make decisions, which is either Thinking or Feeling.

The Thinking preference bases their decisions on facts and they’re logical and objective.

People with a Feeling preference are subjective; their personal belief and concerns for other people shape their decisions.

Carol – Well you know, the last two preferences have to do with how an individual views the way the world is ordered.

A person who shows Judging preference is more structured and more orderly; they are sequential in their habits, they’re productive, they plan and have deadlines for themselves and for others.

Individuals who have a Perceiving preference on the other hand like to be free-flowing, unencumbered by structures and schedules; they’re far more spontaneous; they’re receptive and discover things for themselves.

Maureen – I can see how it would be helpful as a learner to know what my learning preferences are; and how I learn best. And we want to emphasize in the program we’re developing, the importance of considering learning styles when designing and delivering training.

Sheila – Absolutely. There’s one more model I think we should include and let me ask you what you think, and that’s the Sensory Modality Learning Style. It’s probably one of the most well-known. That would be the Kinesthetic, the Visual and the Auditory Learners. How much do you think we should include about that?

Maureen – Well to get us thinking about it, let’s think of the Kinesthetic Learner first. Here are some of the points we really should include about them;

They are action oriented; they tend to use the trial and error method; and these folks really love to volunteer for demonstrations and they often use their hands and gesture when they’re talking, so I don’t know if they didn’t have their hands how they’d talk, (at least) some people I know. They need frequent breaks or changes of pace to help them focus their attention.

Sheila – Well, I envy the Auditory Learners because they’re able to work in a noisy environment and that is not something I can do; and although it’s a generality;

Auditory Learners do well in a lecture environment and they often may not even take notes in class. They enjoy talking and it does not bother them to be in a classroom with a lot of other activities going on and in a noisy environment.

You can recognize an auditory learner sometimes because as they read to themselves they may be mouthing the words while they're reading. They also do well in spelling bees; they're good story tellers although they may be easily distracted. And it can sometimes appear that they're really not paying attention but in fact they are. They might be looking out a window but they are hearing everything that's being said.

And sometimes I think it could be surprising to us to know how much our kids hear and absorb when we think they, they're just in their own world.

Carol – Yeah, well you know I really love designing for people who are Visual Learners because I can use lots of creativity there with colors and maps, and blueprints and all kinds of visual images. Things that help me in both the design and delivery of training for visual learners though, are knowing that they;

Learn best from pictures and graphs and the written word. You can spot them because they usually sit in the front of the room; they take copious notes, they may need to doodle a little, but they also need a quiet learning environment to do their best.

They extract details from the background around them and they remember faces far more than they remember names. They may even close their eyes while they're thinking or listening to enhance that mental picture they're building.

So I think if our goal is for people to apply the knowledge and skills that they learned back out on the job, it's really important for us to think about the different learning preferences of our adult learners.

Sheila - (Writing on pad of paper) Absolutely. I think you've done a great job of capturing of learning styles we want to include! One thing we also want to mention though, is that the need to address a variety of learning styles so that we engage all of the trainees to help them learn more. So, what else do you think we should cover in this webinar workshop?

Adult Learner Characteristics:

Carol – Well you know I think another thing we should consider is that adults have experiences and concerns that we need to acknowledge too. They have classroom or other learning experiences from the past that can really influence how they learn today. For example;

- Learning in the past may have been a very threatening situation
- Instructors may have been perceived as the only source of learning – the typical school model
- Learning may have been viewed as a very passive activity
- And past experiences may have been boring or worse, they could've been irrelevant to the things they needed to learn

So I think those memories can really contribute to the expectations for new learning experiences. And adults learn from each other. They bring work and life experience and expectations for what they want to get out of the training and we need to honor that.

Maureen – You know, that's really true. Adults prefer learning that they can relate to the real work situations.

And I think this is an important point we want to be sure to include when we present this webinar. Adults want to apply new learning and new skills now, or in the immediate future. They don't want to wait because you know you lose some of that. Most adult learners are self-directed, and they initiate their own learning experiences for work or for home when they really see a need to do so.

And so, when there is a need to learn and the motivation to learn, research refers to this as the 'teachable moment'. And I think we've all seen a few of those. We can capitalize on this in teaching work related knowledge and skills as well.

Sheila – Well, I've noticed many adults prefer group activity and interactive learning experiences with discussion and the opportunity to practice or apply new knowledge or skills.

And I think another training bonus for adults that we can point out is the opportunity to build professional networks. And this can happen whether the training is face to face or facilitated online training, through the self introductions, the contact list and the group interaction.

Carol – I would agree. You know one other thing that can impact adult learners too is their personal and work responsibilities. Those impact their time and the ability for them to focus on the learning.

We also want to mention that adults may be distracted due to family, friends or even colleagues; wondering who's doing my job while I am out taking this training? Or it could be concerns about the work that's piling up.

They might even be thinking that they don't expect to learn anything new. You know they've been there, they've done that. So it is especially important for us to establish a positive learning climate right away.

Learning Climate:

Sheila - That's a good point. How do you think is the best way for us to get the concept across about a learning climate?

Maureen – Well, I think the Learning Climate is more of a 'psychological' feeling. Adults need to feel that it's psychologically 'safe' to learn because they invest their egos in the learning process and they want to do it right. They don't like to appear either foolish or incompetent. So we need to spend some time explaining what the learning climate is.

Carol – I would agree. You know some of the things that we could include in our training are things that the instructors could do to help adults feel safe in that learning environment such as;

- Letting them know what to expect and how the learning experience is going to be handled
- Certainly providing any rules we might have for how the training is going to go

Sheila – And I think too if we;

- Share the agenda and the outcomes that we expect from the learners – what is it they'll need to know or do at the end of the training
- And also, let them know how this training is tied to the business needs, back to their job
- I think we can support the learning climate too by planning for introductions and finding out their expectations for the training right up front

Maureen – I think we need to include something about online introductions too;

- Introductions can be done in a classroom setting and they can be done also in an online setting.
- When you're in an online setting, such as WebEx, the learner will provide their name when they

login to the training first of all. They can also raise their electronic hand  or use the whiteboard to list their expectations.

Carol – Yeah, and you know while that ...this isn't part of the actual training experience, it is every bit as important. And that's the Supervisor's role in establishing and maintaining a supportive learning climate for their employees.

The time, the resources and the expectations that this learning will be applied on the job are all ways the Supervisor contributes to a positive learning climate.

Sheila – Absolutely. Research has actually shown that the Supervisors involvement is a greater predictor of usage of the knowledge and skills on the job, than anything else (off camera comment 'Sure is'). So thinking about that...let's think about something else and that's the instructor themselves. Are there some things that we can point out that Instructors can do that promote learning for adults, and maybe we could even include some tips and characteristics of really effective Instructors?

Effective Instructors:

Carol – Well, you know, here's some of the skills of effective instructors that we emphasize when we teach the Instruction Seminar course. We teach them to;

- Manage their time
- To handle distractions
- To draw out all the participants
- To encourage appropriate involvement
- To establish a focus for the content of the course
- To facilitate discussions among the entire group
- And to guide the group's work

Maureen – That's right. The effective instructor is no longer a 'Sage on the Stage' but is really more likely to be a 'Guide by the Side'.

Maybe we can use the visual showing the 'Sage' as the academic model where you listen, I talk, you do hours of application called homework; then you come back, you have a big test, and either you pass or you don't.

Carol – Yeah...been there (laughing). Don't we also have another chart on the 'Guide by the Side' that we might be able to use? If we show that chart while we present the characteristics of the effective facilitator I think it would help. Because it shows that we need to;

- Provide practice exercises
- How to utilize Case Studies to make it real
- How to monitor the group work
- To make sure that we're facilitating group discussions

And we need to point out very strongly that the instructor isn't always the expert. New instructors tend to think that's the requirement. Participants are bringing their own knowledge and their own experience to the training.

Retention:

Sheila – Absolutely yes, and there's another important topic I think we need to include, and that's retention. After all, that's the real measure of the success of training, (which) is whether or not the trainees or the people who attend the training, remember and can apply the learning on the job.

Maureen – Well, something that comes to mind when I think of retention, is techniques the instructor can use to help trainees remember what is taught. An example we could use is a song we all learned as children, and that's the ABC song...and I think we probably still remember it! We learned that rhyme...that rhyme and repeated it over and over and pretty soon we knew our ABC's!

Carol – That's true, we could give some tips on the ways to structure learning lessons to reinforce that learning. Don't we teach some reinforcement tips in the Instruction Seminar? [agreement off camera]. I thought we did. Let me see what I can remember from that.

- I think one of them was plan for participant interaction; to take the time to process the skills and the knowledge that's being taught
- To remember that learning requires involvement by the students, by the instructor to help them
- That we need to plan instruction so the opportunity to practice is included throughout the whole lesson
- That we need to 'Chunk' the instruction, taking "bite-size" pieces of content and building toward a complete application exercise through small activities that measure progress along the way

Sheila – I remember some of those tips too, and one is to;

- Plan for challenging problems to stimulate the learning, and also to
- Teach the way that the knowledge or skills will be used on the job; so if it is sequential, teach it in that same order, and only teach the level of detail that's needed
- And I think for adults too, knowing the requirements makes the learning more effective for them and also,
- Holding them accountable and responsible for the learning through performance based skill checks
- And I think lastly one of the things that we want to point out is to emphasize that enthusiasm and attitude are caught not taught!

Maureen – That's really true. We use an analogy to demonstrate the importance of having opportunities to interact with new information or skills and that's like building a brick wall. Think of the practice or the process time as the mortar that holds the bricks of knowledge and new skills together.

Sheila – (Mmm) An example of building mortar in training is something that I've done in a course that I assisted with, and that's the participants had to demonstrate that they could read a land status map as part of the practice in the class.

And I know this is a surprise to many new instructors when they are developing training for adults; so I think we should probably mention that generally you should plan to initiate new learning about 30% of

the time in your lesson, and allow 70% of the time for processing that information. That would be discussion, expanding on the ideas, practice case studies, things like that.

Carol – Yeah, I agree. You know we've used the "Cone of Learning" when delivering training for new instructors and I think it would be a good thing to include this in the training too.

Wasn't the "Cone of Learning" designed based on research on audio visual methods and how they teach and impact the learning retention?

Maureen – Yes it was.

Carol (continuing) well, that study said that after two weeks we tend to remember...

- 10% of what we read
- 20% of what we hear, like through lectures
- 30% of what we see...pictures; observations without sound
- 50% of what we hear and see, and that would be things like movies, demonstrations, actual performance of a skill
- 70% of what we say, and that's the discussion – those group activities that we have them do
- But 90% of what we hear, say and do; so simulating that real experience; doing the real thing that is as close to what they need to perform on the job as possible, is critical

Sheila – I think so. So the key things we want to emphasize are ways to increase the level of learner involvement using these different media methods. And that reading, hearing and seeing alone are examples of passive involvement, as is hearing and seeing together.

And that while saying and doing are examples of active involvement, and help them draw the conclusion that in general, the more involved the learner is, the more they will remember from the training.

Maureen – What do you think about adding information on research on brain, memory, recall and the effect of instructional techniques? I don't know if you remember, but Tony Buzan in 1999 wrote the book 'Using Both Sides of Your Brain' and he said that when we first read or study material our recall is very high, it's at approximately 75%.

And then about after 10 minutes the recall is even higher, it's at about 90%. It's as if our brains have a chance to finish processing the information. It's a little bit like cookies that need 10 minutes to cool before they are really done and then ready to be eaten. However though, after 24 hours the recall has really plummeted and begins to decline with you know, additional passing of time.

Carol – You know, I remember that study because of the relationship of review and retention. It considered how retention is affected when proper review techniques were used in concert with the learning. We really should review for the first time at that high focal point, that 10 minutes that you talked about, after we learn new material.

But it also recommended that we incorporate a review again after 24 hours and then again after a week and so forth and so forth; to try to build memory in enhancing reviews throughout the instructional period.

But you know because of time constraints and because reviews aren't always built into the lesson plan, instructors don't always do a good job of reviewing the material to reinforce the learning. Planning to

include reviews that link back to the information presented earlier is something I really think we need to emphasize in this webinar.

Sheila – I think you are right! Let me just kind of think about what we've talked about so far. We've talked about learning preferences, adult learner characteristics, the learning climate and ways to increase learner retention. So, I think we have a great start on this project, and I want to thank you both so much for your ideas. And I think we're going to have a very valuable resource for our instructors when we're done! I'm going to type up these notes and I'll send out a message with information on our next meeting date and time.

Carol – Alright, Well thanks! I'm really looking forward to seeing the finished product! When we get done this is going to be great!

Maureen - Me too! You know, I think it's really going to be a big help to our instructors out in the field. See you soon.

Sheila – Thank you both!

Carol – See you...