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USING GROUP LEARNING IN EDUCATION

Effective learning takes place when the essential characteristics of their learning mode are operationalised as principles guiding the process. When educators select appropriate learning-training methods that will best convey the content areas of the training programme to suit the basic criteria of effective learning, learner involvement and sustained interest. In particular, education reflects a specific philosophy about learning and teaching based on the assumption that learners can and want to learn, that they are able and willing to take responsibility for that learning, and that the learning itself should respond to their needs.

According to research, effective education process should encourage students to choose their own programme and projects that are important because they offer them the flexibility and freedom to explore their emerging interests. Learning has experiential learning activities that foster the development of skills and knowledge. This helps in building the confidence and abilities among the learners of today and helps in development of personal relationships not only among them.

Synthesizing information that appears in sources of S. Brookfield, J. Draper, W. Draves, B. Grissom, M. Knowles, S. Imel has summarized the effective education principles that constitute good practice in such education [].

1) *Involve learners in planning and implementing learning activities.* Including learners in the planning and implementing of their learning activities is considered to be a hallmark of adult education. Their participation can begin with the needs assessment process where members of the target population help establish the program goals and objectives and continue throughout the learning activity to the evaluation phase.

2) *Draw upon learners' experiences as a resource.* Not only do learners have experiences that can be used as a foundation for learning new things but also, in adulthood, readiness to learn frequently stems from life tasks and problems. The particular life situations and perspectives that learners bring to the classroom can provide a rich reservoir for learning.

3) *Cultivate self-direction in learners.* If learners have been accustomed to teacher-directed learning environments, they may not display self-directedness in learning settings. Learning process should be structured to nurture the development of self-directed, empowered learners. When they are encouraged to become self-directed, they begin to see themselves as proactive, initiating individuals engaged in a continuous re-creation of their personal relationships, work worlds, and social circumstances.

4) *Create a climate that encourages and supports learning.* The classroom environment should be characterized by trust and mutual respect among teachers and learners. It should enhance learner self-esteem.

5) *Foster a spirit of collaboration in the learning setting.* Collaboration in the classroom is frequently founded on the idea that the roles of teachers and learners can be interchangeable. Although teachers have the overall responsibility for leading a learning activity, in learning settings each person has something to teach and to learn from the other. Learning is a cooperative enterprise that respects and draws upon the knowledge that each person brings to the learning setting.

6) *Use small groups.* The use of groups has deep historical roots in education, and learning in groups has become embedded in education practice.

So, the principles determined by researches can reflect some of the widely held beliefs about learning process.

A growing number of the recent resources dealing with education have focused on adult learning in groups that are more student-centered and participatory in nature (S. Imel, A. Brooks, G. Foley, B. Millis, E. Kasl). As B. Knights says, a group can be an environment in which people invent and explore symbolic structures for understanding the world, learning from each other and trying out for themselves the discourse of the domain of knowledge they seek to acquire [2].

According to research, when forming groups, educators tend to focus on helping learners work effectively together rather than on helping them understand the learning processes that may be occurring in the group. P. Cranton has developed a helpful way of thinking about how groups can accomplish or facilitate different types of learning. He suggests that there are three types of group learning, each affiliated with the following kinds of knowledge: instrumental (scientific, cause-and-effect information), communicative (mutual understanding and social knowledge), emancipatory (increased self-awareness and transformation of experience) [3].

As considered by P. Cranton, the type of learning that occurs in groups varies according to the learning tasks and goals. Group learning that has as its goal the acquisition of instrumental knowledge is considered cooperative one. The term "collaborative" refers to group learning that is based on communicative knowledge. Collaborative learning groups emphasize process and participants exchange ideas, feelings, and information in arriving at knowledge that is acceptable to each group member. Transformative applies to learning groups that seek emancipatory knowledge. In transformative learning groups, members engage in critical reflection as a means of examining their expectations, assumptions, and perspectives [3].

When forming learning groups, one of the main considerations is a group size and membership. Size is an important characteristic of groups. The consensus among group theorists is that smaller groups, those of six or less,

tend to be more cohesive and productive than larger groups. Even in a class of 8-12 learners, therefore, forming two small subgroups might produce better results for some learning tasks.

As S. Imel states, when structuring learning groups, the nature of group learning, the facilitator's role, and considerations about forming groups all intersect. Implementing group learning includes the following questions to consider [4].

What purpose is the group learning experience designed to achieve? For example, is the goal related to developing relationships among the participants, is it focused on acquiring a certain type of knowledge, or both? The answer to this question will affect all other decisions about the learning group. The type of learning in which groups engage affects the role of the facilitator, the relationships that learners are likely to form with one another and with the facilitator, and the type of knowledge that is produced.

What is an appropriate role for the facilitator? Once the goals and purposes of the learning group are determined, the facilitator's role will be more evident. Certain types of group learning may carry certain expectations about how facilitators are to function, but facilitators may choose to adapt their roles because of their personal characteristics or the particular context in which the group is operating. For example, in some transformative learning situations, facilitators may need to step out of their role of co-learner in order to deal with power issues that arise among learners. Also, facilitators need to remember that their roles have limits and that too many factors lie outside their influence for them to control all outcomes.

How should groups be formed? Again, the goals and purposes of the learning group will shape decisions about forming groups. Size considerations are important since research demonstrates that small groups are more effective. However, the size of the entire group or the learning task may affect decisions about the number of small groups and their size. A more difficult question related to forming groups revolves around how group membership should be constituted. Again, the learning tasks and the learners will have a bearing on how this decision is made. Among the questions to be considered are the following: Is the learning group formed only for the purpose of accomplishing a very short and specific task or will it be ongoing? Are the learners well acquainted already? Do learners possess observable or easily obtainable characteristics that could be used to form heterogeneous groups? How important is it that members perceive the group process to be democratic?

So, it may be concluded, that using group learning in teaching can promote teamwork and encourage cooperation and collaboration among learners. When structuring learning groups, the nature of group learning, the facilitator's role, and considerations about forming groups all intersect. When implementing group learning, educators emphasize the importance of learning from peers, and they allow all participants to be involved in discussions and to assume a variety of roles. Educators must listen to what learners say about their previous educational experiences and their current learning goals and use this information in program development.

List of used sources:

1. Imel S., Using Adult Learning Principles in Basic and Literacy Education, <http://library.educationworld.net/a1/a1-6.html> (access 14.09.2015)
2. Knights B., Hearing yourself teach: group process for adult educators, Stud educ Adults, 1993, p. 185.
3. Cranton P., Types of group learning [in] Learning in groups. New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education. No. 71, Jossey-Bass, San Francisco 1996, p. 25-32.
4. Imel S., Adult Learning in Groups, <http://library.educationworld.net/a1/a1-6.html> (access 23.02.2015)