

Adapt teaching style to learning style

It is an innate human tendency to go after the low-hanging fruit - gains that are most easily obtained with whatever means we have available. In the field of education, low-hanging fruits may not necessarily yield positive results. To appreciate what can go wrong with it, I will highlight the differences between "gain" and "goal". I will do this by using the adult learning programme from the Workforce Development Agency titled Advanced Certificate in Training and Assessment (ACTA).

Teachers' KPI versus learners' needs

The first module in ACTA is innocuously titled Apply Adult Learning Principles in Training. In a nutshell, it propagates understanding learners' profiles - and hence learning styles - and applying the most appropriate learning principles to meet those requirements. As a simple example, if a class consists of learners with primary to lower secondary school qualifications, the trainer needs to be mindful of language and pace, and consider degree of verbal or kinetic instructions. The syllabus doesn't change; only the instructional technique changes. So, if our school teachers are given key performance indicators (KPIs) that are pegged to completion of syllabuses, for instance, rather than level of competency of the students, then we have a situation where the low-hanging fruit is to complete the syllabus in the time given. This may not be wrong unless it is achieved AT THE EXPENSE of students' understanding of the subject, or In ACTA terms, the students' competency. Putting it another way, "meeting the KPI" becomes the teacher's gain because it is crucial to his/her career since his/her performance is being measured by it and it's easy to achieve. Surely, however, the goal of education is to ensure competency of learners?

The learning experience is key

The second module in ACTA is titled Design a Learning Experience. Let's take a moment to reflect on what the two key points in this title mean in the real world:

Design - In other words, plan, outline, invent, create, conceive, develop, forge, originate. And how do we do this? By considering the type of learners we have - educational level, age, pre-existing knowledge - we can then design the right methods of instruction to ensure that our goal of learners attaining competency, is achieved. Putting it another way, one teacher could design the same lesson differently for Class A and for Class B because the learners in these classes have different learning styles.

A learning experience - It is easy to overlook the significance of this term. It is not a task; it is an experience. Putting it into its rightful context, the teacher is not just imparting knowledge according to the syllabus, he/she is taking the learners through a journey of learning. It is a learning experience. I

cannot start to describe how powerful this term is. It also puts a lot of power in the hands of every teacher. And rightly so because teachers shape lives and groom leaders. With such great power, surely comes the great responsibility of taking this profession not as a job but a calling. Teachers owe it to every learner to make the learning experience relevant and worthwhile.

It's not what you know but what you do with it

Anyone who's been a learner would probably agree that the most effective - and well liked - teachers weren't always the most knowledgeable or articulate. While it's great to be trained by someone with a PhD in Education, or who spoke like Anthony Robbins, it is often the learning experience that determines its effectiveness. The best teachers are the ones who made the learning relevant to the learners. This can only be achieved if teachers focus more on the "goal" of education - designing a learning experience that meets the specific needs of learners and delivering it with passion.