

Module 18:

**Adult Learning
Theory**

Table of Contents

Overview	1
Adult Learning Theory.....	2
Cross-Cultural Adult Learning.....	4
Motivation.....	5
Active & Passive Learning.....	7
Learning Styles.....	10
Interactive Learning.....	11
Summary	15
Glossary	16
Progress Check	17
Learning Activities	20
1: Learning Your Way.....	21
2: Dale’s Cone of Learning.....	24
3: Interactive Learning.....	26
4: Developing an Interactive Activity.....	28
5: Case Studies.....	30
Progress Check Answers	36

Overview

Introduction

This model looks at some of the principles of adult learning theory.^{*} It focuses on the theory that adults learn best when they can use their life experiences in the learning process.

This module also shows how to apply adult learning theory to WIC education sessions.

Learning Objectives

After completing this module the CNW will be able to:

- Explain 3 things to consider when teaching adults,
 - Identify verbal and non-verbal cues that indicate a participant is motivated to learn,
 - Explain the difference between active and passive methods of learning,
 - Explain 3 ways to increase group interaction by adult learners,
 - Outline what techniques to avoid when teaching adults;
 - Outline ways to lead an interactive group education session on a nutrition topic, and
 - Explain how to use adult learning theory in a case study.
-

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Words that you may not know are **underlined. Definitions for these words can be found in the **Glossary** at the end of the module. (Note: Words are only underlined the first few times they appear in the text.)*

Adult Learning Theory

Teaching Adults Is Different from Teaching Children

When we were children most of us had teachers who knew much more than we. These teachers usually told us what to learn. As adults, we may not know as much as the teacher, but we have a lot of experiences and we often want to talk about what we know and decide what we would like to learn.

The ways we teach children thus may not work well for adults.

Definition

Adult Learning Theory is a set of ideas about how adults learn new skills or information.

Adult Learning Theory, as developed by Malcolm Knowles and Jane Vella, focuses on the idea that **adults learn best when they talk to others about their life experiences and relate these experiences to the learning process.**

Adult Learning Principles

There are many adult learning principles.

The following five principles are key to effective adult learning.

Adult learners need:

1. to be **respected**,
 2. to see the **immediate** usefulness of the learning,
 3. a **safe** learning environment,
 4. to be **engaged** in their learning, and
 5. learning to be **relevant** to their lives.
-

Chart of Adult Learning Factors

The chart on the next page gives more information about the 5 adult learning factors of respect, immediacy, safety, engagement, and relevancy.

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Adult Learning Theory (continued)

Adult Learning Factors

Factor	Description (<i>Learners...</i>)
Respect	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• need to be the subject of their own learning➤ need to be free to decide what to learn➤ like to be part of planning what will happen during the learning
Immediacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• need to see how the learning can be used right away• do NOT like to waste time
Safety	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• need to feel welcome and comfortable during the learning experience• need to have trust in the learning design• do NOT want to be judged• want to be recognized or affirmed
Engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• need to be actively involved in the learning
Relevancy	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• need learning to apply to their family or work lives• relate learning of the topic to their life experiences

Learning Activity 1

To learn more about what helps adults learn you may want to try **Learning Activity 1**.

Cross-Cultural Adult Learning

Adult Learners May Differ by Culture

Adult learners may differ depending on the culture of the participant. What is true for many participants may not be true for all participants.

For example, not all adult learners value self-directedness. Cultures such as the Hmong and Japanese look to their teacher for direction and guidance. Self-direction for adults in these cultures may cause anxiety and discomfort.

What Are Adult Learners in Your Agency Like?

Check with your supervisor or mentor to see what the adult learners from the various cultures served by your agency are like.

Motivation

Motivation

Motivation is what gets people interested in the learning. If a participant does not feel s/he needs a skill or information s/he will not pay attention.

To help participants become motivated:

- be friendly, open, and respectful,
 - point out the benefits of the learning to the participants,
 - make sure the material covered is not too difficult or too easy for the participants
 - encourage participants to say what they want to learn from the session, and
 - give participants the chance to make decisions during the session.
-

Is the Participant Motivated to Learn?

Motivated participants take the information they learn and try to make changes. Unmotivated participants do not make changes.

A participant's verbal and non-verbal cues can show you whether or not s/he is motivated to learn.

Cues that Show Motivation

The table on the following page lists some cues that may show you whether or not a participant is motivated.

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Motivation (Continued)

List of Competencies for Participant-Centered Education

CUE	Motivated to Learn?	
	YES	NO
nods head	√	
smiles	√	
“interested” look	√	
asks relevant questions	√	
leans forward	√	
shares experiences	√	
tries things on her own	√	
adds relevant information to topic	√	
makes eye contact**	√	
“not interested” look		√
drums fingers		√
shrugs		√
closes eyes		√
looks away		√
stares		√
crosses arms and legs		√
rests head in palm of hand		√
yawns		√
easily distracted		√
comes to class late		√

Note: *These may be true for many cultures but may NOT be true for the cultures your agency serves. Make sure you understand the cultures your agency serves.*** (For example, people of some cultures will NOT make eye contact with the instructor.)

Active & Passive Learning

Two Learning Methods

There are 2 methods of learning:

- active
 - passive
-

Passive Learning

In passive learning the learner gets information by seeing and/or hearing.

Examples of passive learning methods are:

- reading
- hearing words
- looking at pictures

We tend to **forget** much of what we learn passively.

Active

In active learning the learner is involved in or participates in the learning.

Examples of active learning methods are:

- participating in a discussion
- helping others learn
- doing a role play

We tend to **remember** most of what we learn through active learning.

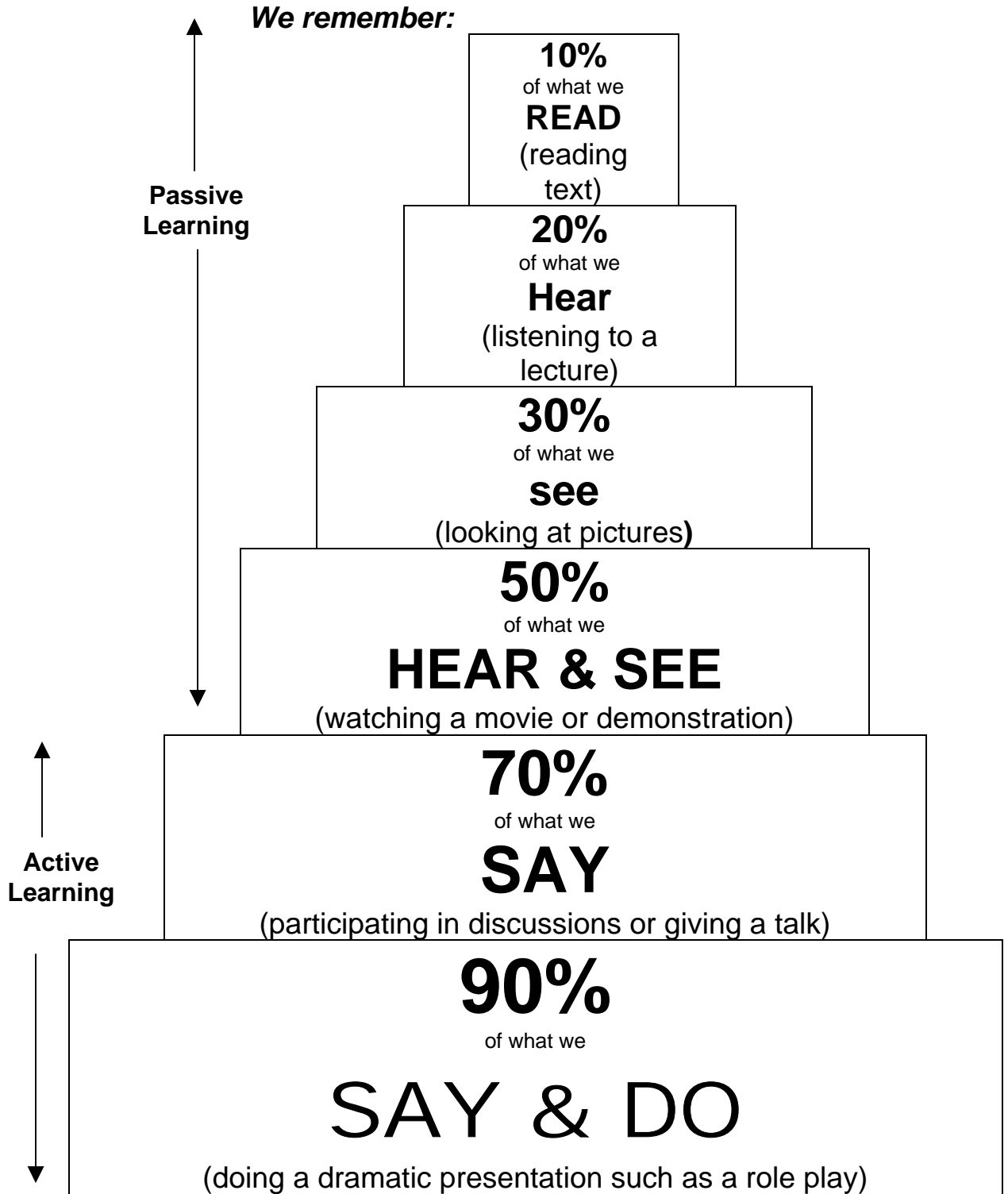
Dale's Cone of Learning

People often remember more of what they learn when they practice or use their learning than when they just read or hear information.

Edgar Dale's Cone of Learning on the next page shows how much we remember from different ways of learning. To make your classes as effective as possible you may want to include methods found near the bottom of the cone.

Active & Passive Learning (continued)

Dale's Cone of Learning



Active & Passive Learning (continued)

Learning Activity 2

To practice using Dale's Cone of Learning you may want to try **Learning Activity 2** found at the end of this module.

Learning Styles

Different Types of Learners

Do you find it easier to learn if you can **see a photo or a poster?** Or perhaps you learn best if you can **read** the information. Someone else may find it easier to learn if they **hear** someone explain the information.

We do not all learn in the same way.

Chart of Learning

The chart below lists some learning styles and an example approach for each learning style.

For a person Who learns by:	Approach & Example
Seeing	Use visuals. For example, show a photo of a baby with baby-bottle tooth decay.
Hearing	Use something the learner can hear. For example, play a rap song about the importance of breastfeeding.
Tasting	Use something the learner can taste. For example, have participants try a low-fat recipe.
Touching	Use something the learner can touch. For example, have the participant hold a 4 ounce portion of food.
Doing	Have participants do a role play.

Use a Variety of Techniques

The participants in your class will have different learning styles. Plan your classes with this in mind. **Use a variety of learning techniques** so that you can help the different types of learners.

Interactive Learning

Definition

Interactive learning actively involves the learner in the learning experience.

It Can Be Fun and Can Prevent Boredom

There are many ways to teach nutrition and health. Not all ways make learning fun. Interactive learning is one way to avoid boredom and to help people learn more.

Techniques

There are several ways that you can make learning fun and interactive. You can use:

- brainstorming,
 - demonstrations,
 - role-playing,
 - case studies, and
 - games.
-

Brainstorming

In brainstorming the group gives suggestions or solutions to a problem or situation.

Here are some tips to help you use brainstorming.

1. Introduce brain-storming rules, such as:
 - No idea is bad.
 - No idea is discussed until everyone has had a chance to speak.
 - Every person gets a chance to speak.
 - Do not judge ideas that come from the group.
 2. Write ideas down on a flipchart or blackboard.
 3. Write down the exact words of each speaker.
 4. When the group has no more ideas to offer, have the group discuss the different ideas.
-

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Interactive Learning (continued)

Demonstrations

A demonstration is a way of showing the group how something is done.

Here are some examples of demonstrations:

1. Using actual foods--- to show what foods can be purchased with WIC food instruments.
2. Using food models--- to show the size of children's food portions.
3. Preparing healthy foods--- to show how to use a recipe for WIC foods.

Example:

For a class about snacks the nutrition assistant shows the participants how to make fresh fruit smoothies.

Role Plays

In a role play two or more people act out a scene. Props (such as dolls for babies) are not needed but may be helpful.

Role plays are great for:

- trying out a new skill and
- practicing a "real-life" situation.

When developing skills you should model the skill before the participants do the role plays.

To do a role play the group must be willing to participate. Use this technique when the participants know each other well enough to feel at ease.

Here are some tips to help you use role-playing

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Interactive Learning (continued)

Role Plays (continued)

-
1. Write down the role play. List the setting, situation, roles, and time for the role play.
 2. Ask members of the group to act out the scene.
 3. Ask for reactions from the role-players and then ask the group to comment on the role play.

Example:

A participant pretends she is a pregnant teen and another participant pretends she is the teen's mother. The teen's mother wants her to nurse her baby and the teen believes she should bottle-feed. They "play-out" the scene for the group.

Case Studies

A case study is an example of a situation or person that is similar to what the class is learning. You can use case studies to help the group review what they have learned.

Many of the situations that you use for role plays will work well for case studies.

Here are some tips to help you use case studies.

1. Give group members a short paragraph on a participant who has a specific problem.
2. Have the group discuss the case and suggest a plan of action . You may want to ask some questions get the group started.

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Interactive Learning (continued)

Games

Games such as game shows and contests help get participants talking.

Here are some tips on using games:

1. Explain the rules of the game even if you think everyone knows how to play.
2. Be prepared to deal with participants who may not want to play. Not everyone likes to play games.
3. Try out the game ahead of time to make sure it will work as you planned. Not all games go as smoothly as you think they will.

Examples:

Here are 2 examples that have been used in WIC classes.

- *Nutrition Bingo to learn the food groups*
 - *Wheel of Misfortune to learn about food safety and sanitation.*
-

Learning Activities 3 & 4

To learn more about making a nutrition topic interactive you may want to try **Learning Activities 3 & 4** at the end of this module.

Learning Activity 5

To learn more about how you can put adult learning theory into practice you may want to try **Learning Activity 5** at the end of this module.

Summary

Adult Learning Theory

Adult Learning Theory is based on the idea that adults learn best when they are able to use their life experiences in the learning process.

Active and Passive Learning

There are 2 methods of learning:

- active
- passive

Active learning involves participants in the learning. Participating in a discussion, giving a talk or doing a role play are some examples of active learning. We tend to remember more of what we learn actively than what we learn passively.

Use a Variety of Learning Techniques

Participants will have different learning styles. Use a variety of techniques in your classes so that you can help all learners.

Interactive Learning

Interactive learning actively involves the learner in the learning experience. Interactive learning is one way to make learning fun and to avoid boredom.

Glossary

active learning – In active learning the learner is involved in or participates in the learning such as through discussion or doing a role play.

adult Learning Theory – Adult Learning Theory refers to a set of ideas about how adults learn new skills or information.

brainstorming – Brainstorming is a technique in which the group gives suggestions or solutions to a problem or situation.

case study – A case study is a description of a person or situation that is studied to decide on the best plan of action.

Dale's Cone of Learning – Dale's Cone of Learning refers to a cone-shaped graphic that shows that when learning is more active more is remembered than when learning is passive.

demonstration – A demonstration is a way of showing how something is done.

engagement – Engagement is actively participating in learning tasks.

immediacy – Immediacy is the direct usefulness of the learning to the learner.

interactive learning – Interactive learning actively involves the learner in the learning experience.

motivation – Motivation is what gets people interested or involved in learning.

non-verbal cue – A non-verbal cue is a message that does not use words. Non-verbal cues can include facial expression, posture or eye contact.

passive learning – In passive learning the learner gets information by seeing and/or hearing.

relevancy – Relevancy is the usefulness, importance, or applicability of the learning to the learner.

respect - Respect is to show consideration for the learner as the subject of her/his learning.

role play – A role play is a situation in which two or more people act out a scene.

safety – Safety is creating a learning environment and a learning design that feels comfortable and safe for the learner.

Progress Check

1. Put a check mark before any of the statements that are usually true of adult learners.

_____ They need to be able to relate learning to their life experiences.

_____ They need to be given grades to motivate learning.

_____ They have the same characteristics regardless of their culture.

_____ They don't like to waste time.

_____ They don't mind feeling foolish.

2. Mark the following "TRUE" or "FALSE"

_____ *Adult Learning Theory* refers to a set of ideas about how adults learn new information and skills.

_____ Dale's Cone of Learning shows us that we remember the most when we read.

_____ Interactive learning can help you prevent boredom among participants.

_____ Not every participant learns in the same way.

_____ If a participant prefers "seeing" when learning it would be a good idea to include slides, photos or some form of pictures in the session.

_____ If a participant prefers "doing" when leaning it would be a good idea to have her sit and listen to a peer's experience breastfeeding.

Progress Check (continued)

3. Put a check mark before any of the cues that are likely to show the participant is **motivated to learn**.

- _____ leans forward in chair, nods, and smiles
- _____ stares out into space
- _____ asks relevant questions
- _____ fidgets with pen
- _____ comes to class on time
- _____ adds information to the topic
- _____ describes positive changes s/he is willing to make

4. Mark the following learning activities as either “P” for “passive” or “A” for “active”.

- _____ reading a pamphlet on nutrition
- _____ watching a video on parenting
- _____ watching a demonstration on how to cook lentils
- _____ participating in a role play
- _____ talking with others about why it is important to breastfeed
- _____ writing a short essay on good nutrition
- _____ looking at pictures of babies with baby-bottle tooth decay
- _____ listening to an audio-cassette on how smoking affects health
- _____ preparing a meal using low-fat recipe

Progress Check (continued)

5. Put a check mark before any of the items that would help increase group interaction in a class on “Eating Healthy during Pregnancy”.

_____ Having a brainstorming session on what foods to eat

_____ Doing a role play where a pregnant participant tries to persuade her peer why she should eat healthier

_____ Having participants view a videotape on eating during pregnancy

_____ Giving a lecture on why healthy eating is so important

_____ Having participants work in teams to solve a word search puzzle on healthy food words

_____ Discussing a case study of a pregnant teen

6. Briefly describe how you would conduct a class on a nutrition topic in an interactive way.

Learning Activities

The following activities are included and are recommended for interactive learning:

- Learning Activity 1: Learning Your Way
- Learning Activity 2: Dale's Cone of Learning
- Learning Activity 3: Interactive Learning
- Learning Activity 4: Developing an Interactive Activity
- Learning Activity 5 Case Studies

Activity 1: Learning Your Way

Learning Objectives

After completing this activity the CNW will be able to:

- Identify some of the needs of adults learners and
 - Identify some strategies which may help address the needs of adults learners.
-

Instructions

1. Think back to a time when you were a student taking a class (taking a high school or college class, an inservice or training you attended for your job, etc.)
 2. Try to remember how the class was set up.
 3. Using your experience from this class, or a combination of classes, complete the forms on the next pages.
-

Activity 1: Learning Your Way (Continued)

1. Why did you go to this class? Did you want to go to this class or did you feel forced to go? How did this affect your motivation in attending this class?

2. What worries did you have about attending the class?

3. What and how much of the information that was given during the class seemed important to you?

4. How was the class taught? By lecture? Through group activities? By discussions? What did you enjoy most?

Activity 1: Learning Your Way (Continued)

1. How was the classroom set up? Did everyone sit facing the instructor? Did everyone sit in a circle? In a half-circle?

2. Who did most of the talking? The instructor? The students? The instructor and the students?

3. List what worked and what did not work for you as an adult learner.

What Worked

What did not work

Activity 2: Dale's Cone of Learning

Learning Objectives

After completing this activity the CNW will be able to:

- Identify what types of activities are more likely to help participants learn.

Background

Passive learning is learning in which the learner gets information by seeing and/or hearing.

Active learning is learning in which the learner is involved in or participates in the learning such as through discussion or doing a role play.

Adults usually learn best through active learning.

Instructions

1. Arrange to observe a group nutrition education class.
 2. Using the form on the next page, record the methods of learning used and mark with a "√" whether the learning was "A" for "active" or "P" for "passive".
 3. Using Dale's Cone of Learning write down details of any activities that involved active learning.
 4. After the session, discuss your observations with your supervisor or mentor.
-

Activity 2: Dale's Cone of Learning (Continued)

Method	Activity	A	P
Reading	reading text reading handouts reading flip chart or blackboard notes		
Listening	listening to a lecture		
Looking	looking at pictures looking at diagrams, charts, etc.		
Hearing & Seeing	watching a video watching a slide show watching a demonstration		
Saying	participating in a discussion explaining to a friend		
Saying & Doing	simulations role plays		
Comments:			

Activity 3: Interactive Learning

Learning Objectives

After completing this activity the CNW will be able to:

- identify interactive learning techniques and
- identify ways to avoid boredom in a group education class.

Background

Adults are often very busy and they do not want to waste their time with boring activities. Making **learning interactive** is one way to avoid boredom.

Interactive learning involves the learner in the learning experience. Interactive learning techniques include:

- brainstorming,
- demonstrations,
- case studies,
- role-playing, and
- games.

Instructions

1. Observe a group nutrition education class.
 2. What types of interactive learning techniques were used? Complete the form on the following page to describe each of the technique(s) used.
 3. You may want to keep a 3-ring notebook of interactive activities that you can use for developing future classes.
-

Activity 3: Interactive Learning (Continued)

Topic:

Type of Activity

Brainstorming

Case Study

Demonstration

Game (Title: _____)

Role Play

Other _____

Equipment/Materials Needed:

Description of Activity

In which parts of the class do you think the participants learned the most? Why?
How would you make the class more interactive?

Activity 4: Developing An Interactive Activity

Learning Objectives

After completing this activity the CNW will be able to:

- Development an interactive activity for a specific nutrition topic.

Background

Adults learn best through interactive learning.

Interactive learning refers to learning in which the learner is actively involved in the learning experience. Interactive learning techniques include:

- brainstorming,
- role-playing,
- demonstrations,
- case studies, and
- games.

Instructions

1. Using the form on the next page, develop an interactive activity for a specific topic.
 2. talk to your supervisor or mentor if you need some help developing an activity. Your agency may have some books that may be helpful.
 3. Present your activity to your supervisor or mentor. Discuss how the activity could be used at your local agency.
-

Activity 4: Developing An Interactive Activity (Cont)

Topic:

Name of Activity:

Type of Activity

Case Study
Demonstration
Game
Role Play
Other _____

Equipment/Materials Needed:

Description of Activity

Activity 5: Case Studies

Learning Objectives

After completing this activity the CNW will be able to:

- Put principles of Adult Learning Theory into practice through discussion of one or more case studies.

Background

When teaching adults you should always make sure you incorporate Adult Learning principles. You may want to reread the Summary before you begin.

Instructions

1. Read each of the case studies on the following pages.
 2. With Adult Learning Theory in mind, describe what went wrong in each case and provide suggestions as to what could have been done to improve the situation.
 3. Write your ideas on the forms that follow.
 4. Talk to your supervisor or mentor if you need some help.
 5. When you are finished, discuss your ideas with your supervisor or mentor.
-

Activity 5: Case Studies (Continued)

Case Study 1:

Maria is leading a class on breastfeeding. She begins the class by explaining how hard it was for her to nurse her first-born. This seems to get the group interested in the topic. However, she continues to talk to the class for at least 20 minutes “non-stop”. After talking for about 5 minutes she notices some of the participants staring and several others becoming restless but continues talking.

What went wrong?

What could Maria have done to make her session better?

Activity 5: Case Studies (Continued)

Case Study 2:

Michael is leading a class on parenting. He really likes a video he has on this topic and begins the class by sharing his excitement about this video with the class. Five of the 15 participants say they have already seen it. Michael asks them what they thought about the video and they all say they learned a lot. Michael then plays the video for the entire group.

What went wrong?

What could Michael have done to make his session better?

Activity 5: Case Studies (Continued)

Case Study 3:

LaTricia is leading a class on feeding toddlers. LaTricia begins by asking the group to list (brainstorm) some of the feeding problems they have had as parents. One participant offers to write down their problems but LaTricia says, "Thank you, I'm fine." The group suddenly quiets down. LaTricia continues to write down the few problems that are mentioned. She then starts with the first problem listed and talks about her solutions.

What went wrong?

What could LaTricia have done to make her session better?

Activity 5: Case Studies (Continued)

Case Study 4:

Mei Ling is leading a class on prenatal nutrition. She knows that many of the participants have children already but she does not want to assume that they “know it all”. She decides to give the participants as much information as possible so that they will “know it all”. She prepares an outline of what she wants to say. She begins to talk, going over her outline. A participant angrily shouts out “We’ve heard all this before!” Mei Ling ignores the comment and continues on talking to the group.

What went wrong?

What could Mei Ling have done to make her session better?

Activity 5: Case Studies (Continued)

Case Study 4:

Helen is leading a class on prenatal nutrition. She enters the class with a basket of infant care products nicely wrapped up. This seems to get the participants' attention. She tells the group that they will get a chance to win the basket. She tells the group that she will hand out a pamphlet on prenatal nutrition and the first person to finish reading the pamphlet wins. Some of the participants look discouraged while others are eager to start.

What went wrong?

What could Helen have done to make her session better?

Progress Check Answers

1. Put a check mark before any of the statements that are usually true of adult learners.

They need to be able to relate learning to their life experiences.

They need to be given grades to motivate learning.

They have the same characteristics regardless of their culture.

They don't like to waste time.

They don't mind feeling foolish.

2. Mark the following "TRUE" or "FALSE"

Adult Learning Theory refers to a set of ideas about how adults learn new information and skills.

Dale's Cone of Learning shows us that we remember the most when we read.

Interactive learning can help you prevent boredom among participants.

Not every participant learns in the same way.

If a participant prefers "seeing" when learning it would be a good idea to include slides, photos or some form of pictures in the session.

If a participant prefers "doing" when leaning it would be a good idea to have h3r sit and listen to a peer's experience breastfeeding.

Progress Check (continued)

3. Put a check mark before any of the cues that are likely to show the participant is **motivated to learn**.

- leans forward in chair, nods, and smiles
- stares out into space
- asks relevant questions
- fidgets with pen
- comes to class on time
- adds information to the topic
- describes positive changes s/he is willing to make

4. Mark the following learning activities as either “P” for “passive” or “A” for “active”.

- P** reading a pamphlet on nutrition
- P** watching a video on parenting
- P** watching a demonstration on how to cook lentils
- A** participating in a role play
- A** talking with others about why it is important to breastfeed
- A** writing a short essay on good nutrition
- P** looking at pictures of babies with baby-bottle tooth decay
- P** listening to an audio-cassette on how smoking affects health
- A** preparing a meal using a low-fat recipe

Progress Check (continued)

5. Put a check mark before any of the items that would help increase group interaction in a class on “Eating Healthy during Pregnancy”.

- Having a brainstorming session on what foods to eat
- Doing a role play where a pregnant participant tries to persuade her peer why she should eat healthier
- Having participants view a videotape on eating during pregnancy
- Giving a lecture on why healthy eating is so important
- Having participants work in teams to solve a word search puzzle on healthy food words
- Discussing a case study of a pregnant teen

Briefly describe how you would conduct a class on a nutrition topic in an interactive way.

Answer should include activities that get the participants involved in their learning. Possible activities include brainstorming, discussion, demonstrations, role plays and/or games.