

Preparing the Extension Volunteer to Teach¹

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This is one publication in the series The Cooperative Extension Volunteer Teacher. This volunteer teacher series addresses the need for guidelines to assist Extension county faculty in the important task of preparing the volunteer to teach.

Overview

Teaching is an integral part of the mission of Cooperative Extension and a volunteer teacher utilizes the same techniques and methods that the Extension faculty use to teach. Preparing a volunteer to teach takes the same careful preparation that is needed by the Extension professional. A lesson is most meaningful when it has been planned, practiced and polished much in the same way that an actor prepares for a performance. Other similarities between a teacher's role and the actor's performance are that the timing must be carefully considered -- not too long for the purpose and not too short. The actor's props are the teacher's instructional aids. In a performance, there is an audience waiting to be entertained. In a class, the students are waiting to interact and to participate in the lesson. The significant difference is that when the play is over, the actor's audience leaves having been entertained. In contrast, the teacher's class leaves with greater

knowledge or skill than they had before they came to the class. This analogy is given to show that preparing to teach takes time; that each step in the preparation and the presentation is important; and that it contributes to the teacher's effectiveness and the outcomes for the students.

Teaching is more than knowing the subject matter. It involves preparation, practice and delivery. It also involves knowing about the learners. Preparing to teach is an important part of the job of the Extension Volunteer Teacher. The following sections summarize some of the important aspects the Extension Volunteer Teacher needs to know about teaching adults.

It is not possible within the context of this module to cover everything that is important in preparing the Extension Volunteer to teach. Only the most pertinent aspects will be covered and these include a basic understanding of adult education as it pertains to the adults as learners and the learning environment. Barriers to learning that typically affect the adult's attention and recall are discussed with some suggestions for overcoming these. The events of instruction are presented as a sequence of "things to do" for both the teacher and the student. One of the

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events of instruction is the choice of method for delivering instruction. The demonstration, used so frequently with Extension clientele, is explained with some suggestions for using questions to elicit discussion and recall.

Adults Differ From Youth in What They Bring to the Learning Situation

Perhaps the most important thing for the Extension Volunteer Teacher to remember is that adults differ from youth in what they bring to the learning situation. These are differences in self-concept, accumulated experience, readiness to learn, and time perspective. These differences have been the basis of the field of adult education which is philosophically and methodologically integrated into Extension Volunteer programs, especially those that involve teaching. Malcolm Knowles (1970) has been especially prominent in making educational approaches pragmatic and useful in adult environments. Knowles elaborates on the major differences between the youthful and the adult learner that have implications for the teacher. These differences between adults and youth will be second nature for experienced Extension volunteers. However, many times volunteer teachers come from 4-H programs or public school teachers. An introduction into adult student differences is appropriate for these teachers.

The Learning Environment

The environment for learning is directly related to differences between adults and youth as learners. There are two dimensions which should be considered in preparing the volunteer to teach. One is the psychological environment which includes the relationship between the teacher and the learner. The other is the physical environment which deals with comforts, needs and conveniences.

The guidelines in Box 1 will help the volunteer teacher to work with adults in ways that will facilitate the learning process. These suggestions will help the volunteer teacher to use the experiences of the adult student to strengthen the learning experience.

These guides are based on Knowles (1973) adaption of the early writings of Carl Rogers work on

adult education. Knowles and Rogers view the teacher as a facilitator of the learning experience. This is a special relationship that is established between the teacher and the learner. It is a personal relationship and has three qualities that distinguish it. It is real and genuine. It shows caring, trust and respect and it is nonpossessive. It uses understanding and sensitive listening (Rogers, 1969, pp. 106 - 126).

The facilitator of learning has the responsibility to understand that the role of the teacher of adults may be quite different from that of a teacher of youth (Knowles, 1970). The Extension Volunteer Teacher will be a learning facilitator.

In the role of learning facilitator, the Extension Volunteer Teacher:

1. Helps to set the initial mood or learning climate for the group.
2. Helps to clarify the purposes of the class and how it relates to individual motives for participating.
3. Identifies and uses varied types and a wide range of resources for learning.
4. Sees himself/herself as a resource for the learning process.
5. Becomes a participant learner that utilizes the experiences of the group to reach the goals of the class.

These guidelines illustrate the attitude of respect for individual differences, experiences, cultural backgrounds that Extension Volunteer Teachers must have when they work with adults in an educational setting.

The Physical Environment for Learning

The physical environment for learning is as important as the psychological environment established by the teacher.

The physical environment deals with those facilities that are required for comfort and necessity. Many of these are not under the control of the

teacher. When they are, attention should be directed to the following:

1. Good lighting and rooms with light colored walls;
2. Good ventilation and fresh air;
3. A minimum of noise from sources outside the classroom;
4. A seating arrangement that promotes communication with other learners;
5. Audio-visual equipment for aiding the instruction process.

These physical surroundings are not markedly different from those needed by learners of any age. Giving consideration to these factors is a matter of common sense. They are listed here to indicate to the Extension Volunteer Teacher that the physical environment for learning is an important factor for the students. It is therefore important to try and exert a positive control over the physical surroundings to the extent that it is possible to do so.

Overcoming Barriers to Learning

In addition to creating a psychological and physical environment to facilitate the learning process, the Extension Volunteer Teacher can overcome barriers to learning that are sometimes, though not always, associated with age. While not all of the participants in an Extension class will be affected by the barriers to learning listed below, the volunteer teacher should be aware that Florida has a significant number of retirees that participate in Extension education programs. An awareness of these barriers to learning will make the teaching and the learning process a more meaningful and rewarding experience. The following is adapted from Bolton, E.B. (1978). Cognitive and noncognitive factors that affect learning in older adults and their implications for learning. *Educational Gerontology: An International Quarterly*. (pp. 331-344).

Memory and Recall. Adults frequently complain that their memory is not what it used to be and that it affects their ability to learn new material. Whether memory deficits are real or imagined, there are some

techniques that will aid both the adult learner and the volunteer teacher. These include: (a) using cues, (b) reducing interference, (c) minimizing conditions that result in insufficient time to respond, and (d) using advanced organizers.

Use Cues to Aid Recall. The use of cues is a means of aiding memory retrieval. A cue is a hint or a signal indicating the nature of something to be recalled. When the material to be learned requires some type of memorization, a cue indicating the nature of what is to be recalled will be especially helpful to adult learners, particularly if they are older. The type of cue to be used will depend on the task. Visual cues such as cards have been helpful in psychomotor tasks involving a series of steps. Verbal as well as visual cues will aid in recalling written or spoken responses. Whatever type of cue is used, it is important that it be available at the time of retrieval and related to the task.

Eliminate Interference During the Learning Process. Adults, particularly older adults, tend to be affected by various kinds of interference if it occurs during the learning process. Interference from concurrent events includes radios or televisions playing during the learning session, children in the classroom, work place noise outside the building or in an adjoining office or class, and students talking during class. Minimizing the conditions that result in interference is frequently not under the control of the teacher. The most efficient way to control for interference is to choose or arrange a setting most appropriate for the learning that is desired. Attention should be given to the physical comforts as well as the arrangement of the instructional setting.

Another type of interference that can be controlled by the teacher is learning a second task on the recall of the first. Many times the content to be mastered involves learning several steps rather than just one, and in some instances these tasks may be similar but different. To minimize this type of interference, a skillful teacher will clearly differentiate the tasks to be learned so that they can be disassociated from each other. When tasks are related, differences should be emphasized and, where appropriate, practice should be provided to reinforce the uniqueness of each task.

Previous learning can be an aid or a hindrance to learning new materials. When old skills and information have to be unlearned or discarded, it can be psychologically painful to the adult learner because it gives the impression that his/her skills are out-of-date and not useful for the present. The volunteer teachers needs to be sensitive to interference from prior learning if it causes a hindrance to the learning process. The volunteer teacher can emphasize the relevance of the new information and relate it to what is already known.

Minimize Learning Conditions that Require a Rapid Response. Adults are often faced with reduced speed in memory recall and psychomotor skills. Whenever possible, learning conditions that require speed should be minimized. Providing opportunities for self-pacing has been an effective means of eliminating the need for rapid response as a barrier to learning. Programmed instruction uses a systematic presentation of the content to be learned in small steps which require the learner to make responses and supply him/her with immediate knowledge of results. An example of this is the tutorial programs that can be used on personal computers. These include lessons on using computer software as well as a great many other content areas such as income tax, personal finance, and foreign languages. Another form of self pacing is the learning module which typically includes objectives, assessments and a variety of materials and experiences used to acquire knowledge for the assessment. In addition to programmed tutorials and the individual learner module, a creative volunteer teacher can modify the task to accommodate reduced speed in recall or psychomotor skills.

Use Advance Organizers. Organizer is a concept used to describe material that is presented prior to the learning event and it is typically at a higher level of abstraction, generality and inclusiveness than the material to be learned. The principle function of the organizer is to bridge the gap between what the learner already knows and what he/she needs to know before the new material can be mastered. Examples of organizers include abstracts, outlines, and summaries. By constructing an organizer for each unit of study, the volunteer teacher provides the learner a general overview of more detailed information prior

to confronting it. Advance organizers help the adult learner incorporate the new learning into his/her existing cognitive structure.

Reduce Anxiety. When adults have anxiety about learning new materials and participating in education programs, it is probably because of early childhood experiences. Anxiety toward learning is exacerbated by the fact that some adults are poorly-educated in comparison to some of their younger contemporaries. The anxiety and the education level of the learners will vary a great deal in classes taught by volunteers. There are some specific steps that a volunteer teacher can incorporate into the learning situation to minimize the anxiety over learning new material that comes from many sources, some related to age, educational level, and negative stereotypes.

Provide an atmosphere of support and helpfulness.

Give learners plenty of time to master new concepts.

Arrange the program so that additional sessions can be added if necessary to cover additional topics or to repeat topics.

Use participative situations to emphasize group support.

Use recognition and praise and avoid criticism and reproof.

Provide for feedback through peers. This is less stressful than feedback from the teacher.

Limit the Use of Evaluating the Learning Activities. The use of evaluation activities will depend on the type and purpose of the learning activity. Some Extension activities demand rigorous testing such as food preparation techniques, pesticide applications, and other information that necessitates precision in application or measurement. However there are many teaching tasks that do not need rigorous testing and evaluation and therefore, self-evaluation or peer assessment will provide a valid measure of accomplishment as well as eliminate the anxiety that often accompanies testing (Bolton, 1978).

The Events of Instruction That Provide a Systematic Approach to Teaching

The role of a learning facilitator for the Extension Volunteer Teacher does not preclude attention to some basic details for planning and delivering instruction in a sequential and logical manner. A planned and orderly instructional sequence is a requirement for most lessons and it fits well with both the traditional and the facilitator teacher role. It behooves the volunteer teacher to be creative in combining methods and approaches for the diverse learning situations that are part of Extension programs.

The first step in any approach to preparing to teach is to decide what the learners are to do. This will guide what the teacher will do in order to bring about the desired outcome. Gagne (1965), and Gagne and Briggs (1974) have described the events that both the learner and the teacher do in the classroom learning environment. They list the following as those things that teachers typically want learners to do in a learning environment.

Teachers want learners to:

1. Give [the teacher] their attention.
2. Know what they will be expected to do or to know when the lesson is over.
3. Remember certain things that are needed for the lesson to be useful.
4. Respond to the task at hand or what is to be learned.
5. Participate in the events of instruction as needed.
6. Let the teacher know how they are responding to the lesson.
7. Know how well they did.
8. Know how you will use this information or skill.
9. Be able to practice what they learned (Gagne and Briggs, 1974, pp. 121-136).

This listing may seem simplistic at first glance. However, each of these is required in the order listed before learning takes place in a classroom. Gagne (1965) describes these as the events of instruction that the teacher is actually able to control in order to bring about certain outcomes. Each event has a distinct effect on the learner. The instructional events guide the sequence that is necessary for learning to occur.

What the Teacher will do and an example of how this will be done is given below.

1. Gain and control the learner's attention. "Look at this."
2. Tell the learner the expected outcomes. "This is what you will be able to do with this lesson."
3. Stimulate the recall of necessary prerequisites which may be other knowledge or skills. "These are things that you should already know how to do before you begin this lesson."
4. Present a stimulus for learning. "These are the pieces/objects we will work on."
5. Guide the learning event. "This is how you do the task or this is a verbal description."
6. Provide feedback. "You are mastering some parts of the procedure and I see that you have been reading and taking notes."
7. Appraise performance. "This is the quality of your work and this is how well you compare to others."
8. Make provisions for transferability. "This is how you can use your new skill or knowledge."
9. Insure retention. "Practice using your new skill in the following ways." (Gagne, 1965, pp. 302-344).

Guiding the Learning Event

Of those events listed above, the preparation for volunteer teacher will center on guiding the learning event. What will the teacher do to guide the learning event? What will the learners do? Will they listen and take notes? Will they ask questions and discuss with

each other? Will they role play? Different teaching methods can be used to create variety in the classroom and to stimulate learning. One of the most commonly used methods in Extension teaching is the demonstration.

Demonstrations. A demonstration is one of the most useful teaching methods for adults. It means to show another person how to perform a skill. Giving an effective demonstration involves three steps: (a) demonstrating or performing the operation, (b) explaining the process that is being demonstrated, and (c) eliciting responses from observers by asking questions. The question phase of the demonstration assures that the observers understand what they are seeing.

Tips on Demonstrating:

1. Have a plan and know exactly what you will do. Know where the demonstration will begin and end, and all of the intermediate steps.
2. Have all materials on hand so that the demonstration is not interrupted by searching for a needed object.
3. Be sure that all observers are able to see each step and hear each explanation.
4. Make certain that observers are comfortably seated and that the room is well-lighted and adequately ventilated. Have area clear of distractions, such as noise from other rooms.
5. Begin by explaining specifically what will be demonstrated and relate that to something with which observers are already familiar.
6. Conduct demonstration slowly and skillfully so learners will not miss key points.
7. Ask questions during the demonstration to be sure that observers understand. Do not delay the demonstration to give long reviews for the benefit of a few people. Plan a follow up session for those who do not understand.
8. Summarize key points at the end.
9. Practice the demonstration in advance. (Adapted from Bolton, 1984).

The demonstration as an illustration of the events of instruction. The well-planned demonstration is an excellent illustration of the events of instruction that are under the Volunteer Teacher's control.

1. Gain the learners' attention by having them observe the finished product or performance of the demonstration. For example, if the demonstration is to give a short speech, begin the lesson with a short speech that contains the elements that you want to teach.
2. Tell the learners what they will be able to do when the lesson is over. This is the objective of the lesson. In this case, it is to be able to give a short speech in front of other people.
3. Stimulate the recall of necessary prerequisites by saying that giving a short speech is much like presenting to one's Family Community Education Club (formerly Extension Homemakers).
4. Guide the learning event by telling how to plan for and deliver each part of the short speech.
5. Provide for opportunity to practice.
6. Provide feedback so that learners can see how they are doing in comparison to teacher's expectations and to other students' performances.
7. Tell students how they can use the ability to make short speeches in everyday life.

Providing Feedback to the Learner about His/Her Performance

Using questions to appraise the learner's performance is one way to give feedback to the learner in a positive way. Questioning techniques can be an important part of lectures, demonstrations and group learning. The importance of asking questions is often overlooked as a teaching technique, especially for giving feedback to the learner. Verduin, Miller and Greer (1977) point out some of the ways that questions can be used effectively to stimulate adult learning.

1. Questions encourage exchange of information and viewpoints.
2. They can be used to assess what the learner knows, to stimulate interest.
3. Questions teach critical thinking and reinforce important points to be remembered.
4. Questions encourage participation (p. 131).

The learner's response will depend to a great extent on how the question is posed. A good question will use vocabulary that is easily understood and conveys a conversational tone. Avoid words that are technical or have specialized meanings. Good questions are prepared in advance and tend to be succinct so that they can be understood by the listener, i.e. they should not have to be written to be understood. Avoid leading questions that suggest an intended answer. Leading questions seek answers that direct the learner's response. Verduin et al (1977, pp. 133-135) point out three kinds of questions that can stimulate the adult learner's response.

Recall questions. As implied, recall questions ask the learner to repeat information that was memorized, retained or recognized. Recall questions also increase retention. The verbs used most often in recall questions are: name, list, identify, describe, relate, tell, give, locate. Some examples of recall questions are: (a) Locate the state highways that are closest to the city where you live. (b) Name the two senators that represent your state in the U.S. Congress. (c) Identify the types of beans that are highest in fiber content.

Evaluative questions. This kind of question uses words to judge the worth of something or to make an assessment. Words that make comparisons or evaluate include: analyze, judge, compare, contrast, differentiate, calculate, measure, appraise. Examples of questions that evaluate are: (a) assess the long term effects of recycling papers and plastics from the home; (b) analyze the budget for the upcoming conference based on what was spent last year; (c) compare the cost of petroleum fuels to nuclear power for generating electricity.

Creative questions. These ask the student to go beyond what is already known and to speculate about the future or what could be. It asks the student to deal with hypothetical situations and to use imagination. Questions that use this technique to involve students contain words such as: create, design, speculate, predict, if this were the case, what would you do if, etc. Examples of creative questions include: (a) what would you do if you were in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean on a raft with three other people and one jug of water?; (b) design a plan that would allow people to work for 40 hours a week but not for five consecutive days; (c) construct a learning plan that is taught by a teacher to 10 students and that does not use any verbal language.

Providing a Example of Good Teaching for the Volunteer Teacher

There is a proverb which states that "A picture is worth a thousand words." The same principle applies to teaching a person to teach. A good example is worth a thousand pages of writing about how to teach. The Extension county faculty is obligated to demonstrate good teaching to the volunteer teacher. Extension implies education and Extension county faculty are professional educators. The volunteer teacher will follow examples, both good and bad, that are set by Extension faculty. Review the methods used most often and the outcomes obtained in examining your own personal teaching style. Ask yourself, "Is this the teaching style I want my volunteer teacher to use?" If the answer is no, work on improving your teaching methods. You will see the results in the outcomes of the volunteer teacher.

The Record of Classes Taught

The Extension Volunteer Teacher is a valuable part of the Extension Program. In that regard, it is appropriate to ask them to keep a record of the hours, location, lessons taught, and attendance, as seen in Box 2. This information will be useful for their organization, particularly the Florida Association of Family Community Education record for Certified Volunteer Units. It will also be useful for the reports that the County Extension Office is required to furnish each year. This record is extremely important

and it should be collected at appropriate intervals during the year.

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Box 1.

1. DIFFERENCES IN SELF CONCEPT	
Adults:	Youth:
tend to be independent	tend to be dependent
like a learning climate of mutual respect between teacher and learner	like adults, respond to a climate of mutual respect
like to determine own learning needs	tend to expect teacher to determine learning needs
tend to be self-directed, responsible	expect to be told what to do
resent being placed in situations where they are treated like children	
2. DIFFERENCES IN ACCUMULATED EXPERIENCE	
Adults:	Youth:
have lived longer; stored more experiences and skills	youthfulness implies a limited store of experiences
want to use these experiences in new learning experiences	less likely to apply learning to the present situation
are capable of being both learner and teacher in a given setting	comfortable in a learner's role
3. DIFFERENCES IN READINESS TO LEARN	
Adults:	Youth:
teacher should be strongly influenced by the needs of the learner	teacher usually takes responsibility for what and when a young person should learn
4. DIFFERENCES IN TIME PERSPECTIVE	
Adults:	Youth:
approach education as something that can be applied to the present	learning is future-oriented.
(Knowles, 1970, pp. 37 - 54)	

Box 2.

The Volunteer Record of Classes Taught				
Name				
Address				
County		Supervisor		
Extension Program				
Date	Location	Lesson	Hours Taught	Number Attending

