

METHODS AND RESOURCES FOR SELF-DIRECTED DEVELOPMENT

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A statement of learning objectives sets the learner on the course to improved performance. Learning, as a way of producing improved performance, is an activity that can be taken on independently by the professional. In fact, an assumption of most staff and/or leadership development programs is that learning is entirely the responsibility of the individual. To help the learners pursue their learning objectives, the material below attempts to clarify different kinds of learning and identify some alternative methods by which such learning might be pursued.

TYPES OF LEARNING AND APPROPRIATE METHODS

There are three general types of learning: cognitive learning (analyzing, knowing), affective learning (values, feelings), and psycho-motor learning (skills, doing). Within these general frameworks there are some general learning categories that might be helpful to self-directed learners as they sort out their learning needs and plan for their fulfillment.

Analyzing may be defined as picking apart the constituent parts of an idea or concept to discover where they come from, how they work together as a whole, how the idea can be best implemented or used, and what conditions are needed to help assure effectiveness. Some techniques for analysis include problem-solving methods, force-field analysis, quantitative analysis, qualitative analysis, values clarification techniques, etc.

Knowledge may be defined as generalizations about experience and/or the internalization of information. Some approaches appropriate to helping with the acquisition of knowledge include lectures, panel presentations, symposium, reading, use of audio and visual aids, and book-based discussions.

Insight and Understanding may be indicated by the application of information or knowledge to experience. Methods which help to produce insight and understanding include feedback devices, problem solving discussions, laboratory experimentation, tests and essays, and case problems.

Skills are defined as the incorporation through practice of new ways of performing. The acquisition of skills may be helped through practice exercises, practice role-playing, drill, demonstration, and practicum experiences.

Attitudes are defined as favorable or unfavorable predispositions toward something. Attitudes are developed through the adoption of new feelings or

predispositions through experiencing greater success with them. Methods for exploring attitudes include reverse role-playing, permissive discussion, counseling, consultation, environmental support, case study. Since attitudes are made manifest by behavior, changing behavior can sometimes affect attitudes.

Values reflect the adoption and priority arrangement of beliefs. Approaches for developing values include biographical reading and drama, philosophical discussion, sermons and worship, reflection, meditation, and assessment of experience.

Feelings include learning about the emotions experiences by yourself and others that influence likes and dislikes, comfort and discomfort, joy, happiness, hurt, anger, psychological closeness and distance, and other emotional experiences that influence behaviors, loyalties, biases, and perceptions. Learning about feelings involves the willingness to risk introspection into one's own emotional realities, psychological rigor and intellectual honesty, sharing and truth-telling about feelings with and toward others, nondefensively receiving feedback about the accuracy of understanding the feelings of others and the impact of one's own feelings on and about others.

Interests have to do with a feeling of concern or curiosity about something. Interests are developed through satisfying exposure to new things or activities. Methods that help to develop interests include trips, visits, audio-visual aids, reading, creative arts, cultural activities, and recreational activities.

SELF STUDY

In the literature of adult education is included this set of formats for individual learning or self study.

Apprenticeship and Internship have long been methods for helping individuals learn particular skills or trades. Serving an apprenticeship or internship with a master in a field can be a most rewarding and learning-filled experience. Many professional development programs in the sciences and other fields are based upon the internship concept. Short term or long term, formal or informal, this format can produce knowledge and insight through instruction by the resource person as well as advanced skill through supervised skill practice.

Correspondence study offers the learner the opportunity to learn "at home" using materials prepared by others and receiving regular critiques of one's work. There are professional "correspondence schools" which make a variety of subject matter available to subscribers. Some have successfully developed individual informal correspondence study programs with friends or colleagues who have a particular expertise that the learner wishes to acquire.

Counseling is intended to include both the process of acquiring information helpful to the accurate diagnosis of learning needs and the process of clinical counseling

concerned with helping a person acquire self understanding. In both of these instances, the use of a qualified resource person or agency is essential.

Consultation is similar to counseling in that it typically involves the learner with an individual resource person. However, consultation places its emphasis on the securing of possible solutions to problems or resources for further understanding of a situation and makes use of the consultant's particular skills for these purposes.

Directed study or Tutorial methods are particularly appropriate for devising tailor-made reading schedules and learning experiences. Periodic consultation with a resource person may include reaction to and synthesis of material, or experience and help on problems encountered in the course of study. Directed study programs may be coupled with others in this listing to good advantage.

Supervision has traditionally been considered a format for providing direction and control of the activities of subordinates. In recent years, however, supervision has been interpreted to be the most valuable learning format available for job-centered learning. Supervision, as a learning method, combines many of the above formats into a performance-oriented, on-the-job development program. Increasingly, the emphasis in supervising others is shifting from controlling the activities of subordinates to guiding and supporting others' efforts as part of a team through training, listening, encouragement, coaching, and feedback.

E-learning can be a valuable format for inquiry, especially when the learning objective clearly identifies a particular skill or body of knowledge to be acquired by the learner. The Internet has revolutionized the process of identifying and retrieving information now at lightning speed and from a global source-base about nearly any imaginable subject.

GROUP STUDY

While most self-development efforts emphasize self-directed learning, it is true that most of our organized learning occurs with other people either in pairs or, more frequently, in groups. Some of the formats which have been successfully employed for group study are identified here.

Group discussions (sometimes more affectionately known as "bull sessions") are, perhaps, the most often employed form of group learning. Informal and with a tendency to meander, this format is often taken for granted and not formally regarded as a legitimate means for learning. Its most obvious weakness is also its strength – a bull session is very informal and typically undisciplined as it is carried along only on the interest and persistence of its participants. Many groups of colleagues have set aside particular times (lunch hours on certain days, etc.) to have informal discussions about whatever interests them (usually "field" related) and find inspiration and fellowship as well as information and new points of view in the process.

Academic courses provide opportunity for the learner to select his subject matter "a la carte" from among those offered by nearby institutions. Many colleges and universities offer extension courses for non-matriculated students, and others will often allow learners to audit courses even though they are not degree candidates.

Outside Workshops, Institutes, and Conferences offered through both public and private organizations may provide the learner with a wide variety of opportunities for short-term learning experiences. Keeping posted on the programs of different organizations (e.g. AMA, ASPA, ASTD, PIRA, etc.) and those of consulting firms and related agencies that have interest and resources in relevant areas.

Clubs, Professional societies, and other organized groups can provide continuing learning opportunities over rather lengthy periods of time in a very informal manner.

Conferences and large meetings of professional organizations or other membership groups usually include a variety of learning opportunities of those who attend. Hopefully, a large conference will help those in attendance to work together in sub-groups for maximum interaction and sharing.

Exhibits, Fairs, and Festivals usually emphasize the display of products, innovations in technology and exposition of ideas and cultural resources that can provide for stimulating learning opportunities.

Action projects focusing on a specific need held in common by several people can provide for a great deal of learning within the specific area of interest involved.

Task forces, Committees, or Study groups within the organization may be convened to investigate a particular field of concern and propose actions to be taken by the decision-making group (Board, Executive Committee, etc.) on behalf of the organization.

SUMMARY

When individuals takes on the responsibility for being lifelong learners, the world is truly their oyster, their "university," their magical and infinite source for growth. There are no limits to what can be learned. And, since learning is one our most intrinsically rewarding things to do, there is only to enjoy it. Have fun!