

Systemation's Approach to Learning

Facilitating the Adult Learner

Systemation uses an appropriate and consistent adult learning approach based on the course content strategies and factors in the learning style preferences of adult learners to provide truly meaningful and engaging classroom experiences.

It is well known among educators that "Individuals differ in their general skills, aptitudes, and preferences for processing information, constructing meaning from it, and applying it to new situations." (Jonassen & Grabowski, 1996) Why is it then that so many training and education professionals employ a teaching philosophy that emphasizes the "teacher" as deliverers of information and the "learner" as simply the receiver of information? This methodology works to some extent but does not always consider the various differences between learners as mentioned above. If the goal of the training program is to have the learning transfer to the actual performance of the work the individual performs back on the job, then how can we make sure that happens?

We do that with an understanding of both adult learning strategies and learning styles. Knowing the goal of the instructional content and selecting a strategy that best supports that goal is one primary consideration. Another is designing the classroom experience so that it appeals to all learning styles over any one learning style.

The Systemation Approach

Learning involves the whole mind and body. Learning is not at all merely "head" learning (conscious, rational, "left-brained," and verbal) but involves the whole body/mind with all its emotions, senses, and receptors.

Dave Meier

The Accelerated Learning Handbook

Systemation *facilitates* learning rather than *teaches* it. Facilitators create an environment where learners are encouraged to interact and engage the whole mind and body in the learning activity, and this links critical thinking with real-life application. Teaching, on the other hand, tends to emphasize delivery of information to the learner without regard for learning preferences, the needs of the learner, or the transfer of learning to the job. Systemation believes that in order to be successful, project managers and business analysts must learn in an active, encouraging and stimulating environment.

Systemation ensures that learners are engaged in the learning process. Concepts are introduced and explained in a lecture format that never exceeds 30 percent of the classroom experience. The overwhelming majority of class time is spent with learners working collaboratively to seek solutions to problems set in real-world contexts.

Acquiring knowledge in the context in which it is meant to be used facilitates recall and application of concepts and skills learned (Wilkerson and Gijsselaers, 1996). As students engage in solving problems, they develop critical thinking and problem-solving skills, as well as learning content essential to the course.

Theory and Practices of Adult Learning

Many instructors are too verbal. Words are important, and no instructor can do without them, but words usually convey only part of the meaning. Students must participate to completely understand.

Miller and Miller

Instructors and Their Jobs

Learner motivation is a direct result of the interactive nature of the learning environment. Adult learners desire to be equal contributors to the learning experience, knowing that they have valuable life experiences to share with others. While motivation itself can not be observed or its attributes necessarily defined, learners demonstrate their motivation based on their willingness to get involved in the learning activities. Systemation's focus is on the learner being engaged in the learning to the extent that an outward manifestation of "motivation" is observable. That is, the learner is actively contributing and engaged with other team members throughout the learning process. Our results and evaluations show that our customers find great value in Systemation's facilitation approach.

Raymond Wlodkowski (1999) suggests that "when there is no motivation to learn, there is no learning...when motivation is very low, we can generally assume that potential learning achievement will to some extent be diminished." In addition, when the learners return to the job they are more productive based on retention of the information. Wlodkowski goes on to state that learners who have a positive experience are more likely to use the information when they return to the job. Systemation's clients demonstrate significant increases in productivity as a result of our focus on the learner's motivation and the instructional methodology we employ in all of our courses. Systemation brings information, tools and resources to our classrooms to reinforce the learning process and to actively engage the learner.

Some research indicates that when the learner is not engaged and actively practicing what is being learned, forgetting begins almost immediately. Estimates suggest that if the learner has done nothing active with information given during an hour lecture, 50 to 80 percent of that information will be lost by the second day. After seven days the learner will have lost approximately 95 percent recall of the information. Systemation's approach involves learners in activities to ensure they understand and retain information and practice new skills. Learning versus memorization; that's the Systemation difference!

What is learning? According to several researchers, learning is a change in behavior as a result of an experience. What type of experience can a learner gain sitting in a classroom lecture for 8 hours? Without experiential reinforcement and an activity-based approach to learning most of the learning will be lost. Practice is necessary for full cognitive and psychomotor development to occur. Researchers all seem to arrive at the same conclusions with regard to the adult learner; experience is the most effective means for adults to learn. Incorporating activities and experiences in the classroom will have the most profound effect on adult learners, which will enable more of the learning to transfer to the work environment.

Characteristics of Adult Learners

Most instructors in adult education programs are expert in the content they teach, but they usually have little preparation in the process of helping adults learn.

*Alan B. Knox
Helping Adults Learn*

There has been a tremendous amount of research conducted regarding adult learning. One key contributor is Dr. Malcolm Knowles. He suggests that there are two models for learning; pedagogical and andragogical. The pedagogical model applies primarily to the experience of teacher as deliverer of information. Pedagogy applies the traditional practices of classroom instruction that western school systems use and are commonly used in the cultivation of intellect. In the United States, as well as Australia, the pedagogical model is the method used in primary and secondary schools. The concept is that the student is an empty vessel to be filled by the teacher. Students typically have very little life experience and contribute little to the structure of the learning.

According to Knowles, the andragogical model suggests that adult learners come into the learning environment with more knowledge and life experiences; therefore, the best learning techniques are group activities which include discussion, simulations, exercises, problem solving projects, and so forth. According to Knowles research, "inappropriate, boring, or seemingly peripheral training programs can actually reduce or temporarily extinguish the motivation that participants bring with them to the course."

In order for learning to be engaging, the following considerations must be kept in mind. "Learning must be problem centered, learning must be experience centered, experience must be meaningful to the learner, the

learner must be free to evaluate experience, goals must be set and pursued by the learner, and the learner must have feedback about progress toward goals” (Brookfield, 1986). Systemation encourages our facilitators to incorporate these aspects of adult learning into our courses as they are the basis for interpreting how learners will respond to the learning environment and the extent to which they will be motivated throughout the course.

Adult learning theory suggests that adults perform better in classroom situations that offer more than just the traditional stand-up presentation method. Although lecture is a valuable part of our instruction for learning new knowledge, it is not the best method for transferring skills; this is why we emphasized *active learning*. We understand our learners come to the classroom with preferred learning styles and these must be factored into our course delivery. Learning styles emphasize the modalities people use to learn.

Visual learners need to *see* the content to make sense of the information. Visual learners prefer to have displays, diagrams, illustrations, power points, video, and other forms of visual stimulation. Auditory learners need to *hear* the content. They prefer lectures, discussions, and group interaction. Kinesthetic learners need to *touch* the content through activity and hands-on application. They prefer not to sit in lectures, but rather explore the physical world in which they find themselves. David Kolb suggests there are four learning forms; Concrete Experience, Reflective Observation, Abstract Conceptualization, and Active Experimentation. Using Kolb’s theory, Systemation courses are designed to appeal to all learning modalities so each learner experiences a deeper assimilation of knowledge and skills.

Our courses challenge the learner throughout the learning process with course materials that stimulate cognitive processes through lecture, discussions, problem solving, and other activities. We increase skill proficiency by engaging class participants in group activities and simulations. This focus on multiple learning modalities ensures that the needs of each learner are met throughout the course.

Our Philosophy toward Adult Learning

Knowing is not enough; we must apply. Willing is not enough we must do.

Goethe

Systemation’s focus on a particular adult learning philosophy is based on observable and measurable results from our courses. Our approach when presenting adult learning programs balance on two key philosophies; personal development and organizational effectiveness. Personal development for our program participants is a major concern as we emphasize the learner in the learning process. Our experience indicates that when the course focus is on the learner, there is greater understanding of the material and personal growth. While personal development is critical to the learner’s success, we also emphasize organizational effectiveness. Individuals attend our courses because they understand the need to learn new skills and knowledge and return to the work environment prepared to make even greater contributions. Systemation understands that. We also understand that skilled and knowledgeable individuals are not enough to contribute to overall organizational effectiveness. Individuals must be able to work *together*. We emphasize group interaction as the foundation of our instructional methodology. Skilled and knowledgeable collaborative teams are your company’s greatest asset today.

Problem Scenarios

In the Systemation approach, a problem is a statement of a real-life scenario designed to challenge learners, promote the acquisition of knowledge, and encourage the development of effective problem-solving and critical thinking skills, all of which requires collaboration with peers.

Problems are designed to be relevant to the real world to incite learners’ interest and their desire to find a real solution. Typically, scenarios focus on a simulated company, similar to the one program participants work for, and present many of the same situations project managers and business analyst face in their own organizations. The most effective problems are complex, open-ended, present a minimal amount of information, and do not have a singular solution or do not require a singular method for reaching a solution.

Driven by the need to find a solution, participants team up and use their collective analytical skills to determine which business issues or questions to investigate. They identify and locate resources and gather and evaluate information. They also decide if and how to integrate the new knowledge into what they knew previously about the problem and decide how to communicate that information to others.

Teams return to the group to report on the results of their analysis. Using a peer review process, each team gains a greater understanding of the “problem” and revises their approach in light of new knowledge. The cycle is repeated until the analysis is complete.

Elements of the Systemation approach

- **Learner-centered** - Learners become actively engaged in the classroom and become responsible for their own learning, as well as that of their team.
- **Collaborative environments** - Learners work in small groups and build teamwork skills as they gain greater understanding together.
- **Facilitators versus “Teacher”** - Facilitators limit lecture, guide learners in the processes of discovery, inquiry, analysis, and reporting, and help them evaluate their work.
- **Requires action** – Business scenarios become the stimulus for learning and for the development of problem-solving skills. Each exercise requires that participants take action by practicing the skills needed to put together a reasonable solution, just as they would with real-world deliverables and projects.

Our Facilitators

Systemation facilitators play a critical role in setting up the simulation and then stepping back to allow the teams to develop and experience first-hand the process they must follow in problem solving and decision making. Our facilitators are available to assist learners and encourage them to explore the concepts through class activities and group interaction.

Facilitators lend their expertise when introducing concepts, providing examples, asking challenging questions, and probing for understanding. They make resources available and encourage self-evaluation. They monitor the process throughout and evaluate the effectiveness and quality of team outputs.

Systemation’s goal in all of our courses is to provide stimulating, active and experiential-based programs. While our methodology may be a cultural shift for your learners, we are confident that your program participants will grasp concepts and gain best practices faster than when a lecture-only approach is used. We believe the Systemation approach creates an innovative learning environment that ensures your course participants return to the job more confident and productive.

Systemation’s Project Management and Business Analysis workshops are delivered in Australia nationally through Dimension Data Learning Solutions.

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