Educational Delivery Formats

One of the first decisions an educator will make is the selection of an appropriate educational delivery system. Common delivery systems include:

- Informal meetings
- Tours
- Formal courses (credit and non-credit)
- Workshops
- Institutes
- Seminars
- Conferences
- Conventions

Selecting the most appropriate educational delivery system is dependent on several factors. However, the delivery system may be prescribed by another individual or an organization, and not left to the discretion of the adult educator. If the decision is left to the adult educator, input from an advisory committee (see Chapter 6) is recommended. Factors to consider in selecting the most appropriate delivery system include:

1. Purpose of the educational program (program outcomes)
2. Objectives (learner goals/outcomes)
3. Anticipated number of participants
4. Participant travel (distance and expense)
5. Available facilities, equipment, and resources
6. Estimated budget (income and expenses)

After determining the delivery system, additional planning is necessary to conduct an effective adult education program. Specific details to be addressed relative to planning the adult education program are outlined in Chapter 8.
One important aspect of the planning process involves the selection of the teaching methods employed to fulfill the intended educational purpose of the program. The remainder of this chapter will be devoted to various teaching methods that can be used effectively in adult education.

Teaching Methods Used with Adults

Teaching methods can be divided into three major categories as follows:

1. One-way communication methods
2. Two-way (interactive) communication methods
3. Laboratory (skill development) methods

The selection of teaching methods from one or a combination of the categories is dependent upon the intended outcome (objective) and the maturity (readiness level) of the learners, from a knowledge and skill perspective.

One-way communication methods are most appropriate in situations where the objective is primarily focused on transmitting information from one or more sources to a group of learners. In this case, the intended audience would be assumed to have limited background information regarding the subject and would receive the greatest benefit by simply expanding their knowledge base through the acquisition of new information.

As adult learners gain in their educational maturity, due to an expanded knowledge base, utilization of two-way (interactive) communication methods may be employed to facilitate an exchange or dialogue between the information source and the adult learners. Adult educators should become adept at planning educational activities that combine methods, initially utilizing one-way communication methods and moving toward two-way (interactive) communication methods as learners "mature."

Laboratory teaching methods are used in learning situations where the objective is to gain or acquire knowledge and skill in the performance of a psychomotor task. Laboratory teaching methods are also useful in situations where observation of an application, practice, or skill is desired.
Selecting the Appropriate Teaching Method

When selecting the most appropriate teaching method(s), there are several factors that should be considered. Factors to consider include:

1. Objectives — desired learner outcomes
2. Subject matter (content)
3. Available facilities, equipment, and resources
4. Characteristics and backgrounds of the learners
5. Desired interaction of learners among themselves and with the instructor
6. Available time
7. Policies of the learning (educational) institution

The first factor to consider when selecting the most appropriate teaching method is the educational program’s objective for teaching the subject (see Table 3). The instructor must determine if the purpose of instruction is to provide learners with new information (knowledge); teach learners how to apply new information (understanding); teach learners how to perform a skill; or help learners to modify, adopt, or clarify their attitudes or values. The objective is the most important factor in selecting appropriate teaching methods.

A closely related factor in selecting teaching methods is the subject matter (content) to be taught. Some topics naturally lend themselves to one-way communication methods because the content is new to the learners and they need a basic knowledge of the subject matter to internalize the information. As the learners mature in their knowledge of the subject matter, the teaching methods may change. Subject matter that involves learning a new skill or a new way of performing a skill, may be taught most effectively through demonstrations, role-plays, and computer-aided instruction.

The facilities, equipment, and resources available will greatly influence the teaching methods selected. Certain teaching methods may require particular room arrangements and space. Some teaching methods will require specialized laboratory equipment. In some situations, there may only be one piece of equipment to perform a demonstration, consequently limiting learners’ opportunity to practice and acquire the skill.