

# 1 A framework for designing and delivering teaching and learning

Learning and teaching events must be based on an understanding of how to create effective learning opportunities. This does not mean that every session you plan needs to be influenced by extensive reading of the pedagogical research for each type of activity, but rather that it is vital that you establish a baseline understanding of core teaching theory and how it relates to information literacy and the library and information context.

There are disputed philosophies of teaching, based on quite different conceptions of the world, for example:

- Sociological theories of teaching rest on the idea of groups, communities and societies.
- Psychological theories often emphasize cognitive development, involving information processing and development of thoughts and ideas
- Behaviourist theories focus on the idea of conditioned learned behaviour often dominated by the teacher.
- Constructivist theories involve the learner making connections for themselves and being encouraged to link to prior knowledge and experience.

Do note that when we write about a ‘teacher’, we mean the person leading or designing a learning and teaching opportunity – you. When we write about ‘sessions’, we mean a learning and teaching event in any form, including interactive learning online or self-guided learning materials. Vocabulary is difficult in this sphere.

From a practical perspective, the most useful approach your authors have used in designing, delivering and reviewing teaching is the framework drawn up by Geoffrey Squires (1994). This can be applied very effectively to the library and information context. It has three parts:

- the optimal conditions of learning
- the functions of a teacher
- variables in teaching.

## PLANNING

Squires (1994, 17) discusses the optimal conditions of learning, which are grouped under four headings – person, process, information, environment:

- The person who learns must have a *positive self-concept*, an *open mind* and the necessary *ability* and will *prioritize* the learning activity.
- The process must be *active* (learning by doing), *reflective* (so information can be internalized), with suitable tasks that enable the *processing of information*.
- The information that is learned should be *patterned*, *meaningful*, *embedded* (part of a curriculum or which can be integrated into work or life) and *embodied* (usually in the teacher, but perhaps in peers or family members).
- The environment in which learning takes place should offer *stimulus*, *support*, *feedback* and *reward*.

Other tips in this book discuss the learning situation in more detail, but this summary should be very helpful in auditing your own teaching situation and especially in identifying areas that need to be given priority in planning.

Learning often needs facilitators or teachers to guide the learners and to structure learning opportunities. Squires (1994, 38) lists the functions of a teacher being to:

- motivate
- audit
- orientate
- inform
- explain
- explore
- develop
- exercise
- appraise (or assess)
- reinforce.

There are tips throughout this book for each of these functions.

We should emphasize that although there may be some distinctive aspects to teaching as a library and information professional, the core principles of teaching remain the same. What you will find are many different variables, including:

- Rationale: what is the purpose of this session?
- Context: why is this session taking place?

- Process: what kind of teaching methods will you use? How will the session be structured?
- Level: what age and skill level are you working with?
- Group: what are the group dynamics? Is it a large or a small group?
- Individual: especially if working with smaller groups, the impact of individual learners is very noticeable.
- Self: how do you feel? We do not all teach the same way (nor should we) and we can have good days or bad days; we can like or dislike our material, or sometimes be less confident than usual.
- Physical setting: is the room suitable and set out the way that you need it to be?
- Organizational setting: is the wider organization supportive or not? Is this session seen as a good thing or not?
- Social setting: do your learners know each other? Is it a social gathering? Are there cultural or group issues?

Each element of the framework contributes to effective teaching.

Identifying which aspects of the optimal conditions of learning may be most challenging (and which the most straightforward) will be a starting point in planning your learning and teaching event. If you know your learners may not prioritize the learning, think about how you can link it into assessments or their core activities; if your physical environment is less than ideal, think about how you can compensate for its limitations.

The second element, which covers the functions of a teacher, should be the basis for designing your learning and teaching event – think about how you will perform each of these functions.

Finally, the variables means that you should not rely on ‘recipes’ for success: variables influence the outcomes of any teaching that is undertaken and you need to be flexible and responsive to contingencies.

### ✓ BEST FOR

- This framework can be applied in all learning and teaching contexts for any discipline or level.

### + MORE

- The variables are always going to change – it is their nature.

## PLANNING

Consideration of the variables will influence the shape and nature of whatever learning and teaching event you plan.

### 🚫 WATCH OUT

Be careful of:

- **Orthodoxy:** This is perhaps a rather extreme term for always taking the safest, least ambitious path in planning your teaching. Sometimes you should take risks and try out a completely different plan for your session. It can be tempting to believe that there is a 'right way' of teaching a specific topic, but this is not true: there are many effective ways of teaching the same content.
- **Imbalance:** Sometimes you can focus too much on one part or issue of your teaching without stepping back and thinking about the whole learning experience. This is manifested in many different ways: you might spend too long on one part of a topic (e.g. password management) and lose the interest of your learners; or you might be so keen on a particular teaching approach that you incorporate it into sessions which may not be suited to it.
- **Theory:** Effective teaching is a balance between applying your knowledge of pedagogy and sensitivity to immediate circumstances. Finding out more about learning and teaching, reflecting on your practice and evaluating what you do are essential parts of teaching. But be careful you do not let external rubrics dominate teaching situations.

### 📖 REFERENCE

Squires, G. (1994) *A New Model of Teaching and Training*, University of Hull.

### ➔ FURTHER READING

Atherton J. S. (2011) *Learning and Teaching*, [www.learningandteaching.info/learning](http://www.learningandteaching.info/learning).  
(A UK academic's overview of learning and teaching theory, a good place to start for an overview.)