how to:

Develop Teaching Briefs and Plan Teaching Sessions

Janet MacDonald & Rhys ap Delwyn Phillips

Course organisers often receive criticisms from participants when lecturers and facilitators fail to meet both the expectations and needs of course participants. This issue can be partly addressed by producing a clear and informative teaching brief for invited speakers. Knowing what is required is the first step towards planning the teaching session. Planning of sessions is frequently neglected or, at best, focussed on delivering content rather than planning of an educational experience to meet learners needs.

What is a teaching brief?

The Teaching Brief bridges the gap between:

- The course / programme organiser’s expectations and the teacher’s perceptions of the learners’ needs.
- The currently established teaching practice and the potential teaching opportunities presented by the available resources.

The two aspects of a Teaching Brief are:

- What the teacher needs to know about teaching at your location.
- What the teacher needs to know about the purpose of their input and the nature of their audience.

The former is an obvious courtesy – the latter may well be a useful exercise even for ‘internal’ teachers in order to ensure effectiveness and efficiency of teaching. Teachers often have little knowledge about the other aspects of the course upon which they are teaching.

The Basic Contents of a Teaching Brief

- The Teacher’s Guide to the Venue – contacts, financial arrangements, location and maps, transport, access, accommodation, refreshments.
- Educational Resources – available rooms and seating arrangements, AVA facilities, staff available to assist, pre-booking requirements.
- Teaching Requirements – There may be an understandable reluctance to be prescriptive but you do need to identify the content area to be taught. The degree of specific detail will vary depending on the type of course/session being taught.
- ‘Housekeeping’ issues – start, finish and break times, evaluation forms, refreshments, any safety regulations etc.
The Purpose and Context
It is important that the lecturer knows how his/her contribution fits into the whole programme, what the learners need and how you think these needs can best be met.

- Relevance - interpretation of the needs assessment, organiser’s expectations.
- Subject Area/content - presented as a working title with some pointers as to:
  - Breadth versus the depth.
  - What Style / level of audience participation is desirable.
- The audience:
  - Characteristics - numbers, age, experience, current knowledge, attitudes, skills.
  - Features of the locality they serve - population, resources available to the audience to deal with problems in their locality.
- Teaching methods - Are you looking for a didactic lecture, “Masterclass”, workshops, seminars or ‘Hot Seat’ sessions.
- Emphasis - with regard to the content what emphasis is appropriate?
  - Revision issues, the local issues, case presentations, innovations.
  - Examples of good practice, protocols, guidelines.
  - Clinical effectiveness, clinical governance, audit.
- Evaluation - how will the session(s) be evaluated?
- Further information - It is important to state whether the particular contribution you are commissioning is a stand-alone event or part of a course or theme. You could provide current / past programme as an example of where the session fits in to the programme and give examples of events which have been a success.

Teaching briefs are usually welcomed by anyone who is asked to teach on any course or programme and have a crucial role in the planning of the teaching session.

Lesson Plans – Why Bother?
Often busy clinicians feel that there is little enough time available for face-to-face teaching and that there is certainly not enough time available for detailed lesson planning. Lesson planning does not need to be a lengthy process but a small amount of time at this stage can help ensure a more effective teaching session as a result. By going through the process of planning a lesson you also need to reflect on what you want to achieve and how this can best be done.

Planning Structures
There are many different approaches to planning and designing sessions and it is important to select a framework which you feel is appropriate to you. One example is given below which was developed by Gagné (1992).

- Ask for a teaching brief to help you plan your session
- Be flexible and be prepared to use your plan as a guide
- Be adaptable – have some alternatives e.g. a range of scenarios or tasks
- Taking time at this stage will improve the effectiveness of your session
- Consider the learners needs and what difficulties they may have in learning this new knowledge or skill
- Build in time for learners to rehearse or practice where possible

Further Information

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