

Develop Teaching Briefs and Plan Teaching Sessions

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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.

A teaching brief should contain all the information that those teaching on your course or programme will need to plan and deliver an appropriate high quality teaching session.

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).

Gain Attention – it is important to ensure learners are focussed on the topic (e.g. a very brief scenario relating to the topic, a clinical slide etc can be used).

Inform learner of objective – this doesn't have to be a tedious list of session objectives but you could inform the learner of what they will know or be able to do as a result of the session.

Stimulate Recall – You need to relate your session to previous learning (e.g. could ask questions, quiz, present key points etc.).

Present Stimulus Material – key information giving or presentation of new learning.

Provide Learner Guidance – you can help learners make sense of new material and, perhaps, give guidance on how this learning could be accessed or recalled.

Elicit Performance – give the learners an opportunity to use the new learning (e.g. set tasks, ask questions, give problem scenarios etc.).

Provide Feedback – this can be done in response to the level of achievement of tasks etc.

Assess Performance – by asking questions or setting tasks you will be able to see if learners have grasped the key points and you will be able to adapt your lesson plan or reinforce important aspects.

Enhance retention – Consider ways in which your learners can remember and utilise new learning (e.g. establishing relevance for learners and setting in appropriate contexts for them by using their experiences and situations).

This approach does not have to be linear but you need to consider all aspects in planning your session.

A Few Tips

- ▶ 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

Curzon, L.B. (2004) *Teaching in Further Education: an outline of principles and practice* (6th Edition). London: Cassell.

Gagné, R.M., Briggs, L.J. and Wagner, W.W. (2005) (5th Edition). *Principles of Instructional Design*. Orlando: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.

Smaldino, S., Lowther, D., Russell, J. (2008) (9th Edition). *Instructional Technology and Media for Learning*. New Jersey: Pearson Merrill Prentice Hall.

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