DEVELOPING AWARENESS OF ADULT LEARNING AND TRAINING STYLES IN AN AUTOMATED ENVIRONMENT
http://web.simmons.edu/~chen/nit/NIT%2791/191-sas.htm

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Keywords: Adult Learning, Automation, Library Automation, Education and Training, Information Technology, CD-ROM, OPAC, Online Public Access Catalog, Public Libraries, Online Searching, Washington State Library.

Abstract: In recent years library literature has had extensive coverage on training for information technology. While most of the literature still focuses on academic and special libraries, public libraries are at last recognizing the need to spend time and attention on orienting users to new technologies, notably CD-ROM products available for public use, and online public access catalogs (OPACs). While the need for training has been identified, documented follow through is slow to evolve. This paper will discuss issues relating to the lack of written training policies and offer practical suggestions for developing an informal, yet cohesive training program, utilizing awareness of adult learning behaviors as well as trainer styles.

The information explosion has brought new independence to users of libraries. Gone are the days of laboriously filling out request slips for books or periodicals, handing them to library staff who scurry off to hidden stacks only to return empty handed because the item is missing, checked out or misplaced. Today's library user more often than not has at his disposal an OPAC or CD-ROM work station, complete with printer, allowing him to search holdings for several libraries and find out the status of the items in question. While no one will dispute the fact that this is progress, this new capability is not without some very real dangers. Most notable among the pitfalls of this new-found user independence is the, "the-computer-said-the-library-didn't-have-it-so-I-might-as-well-forget-it" syndrome. Too often users who have had little or no instruction are willing to take "no" for an answer if it comes from a computer terminal. When people with inadequate, or worse, no training, use automated catalogs of any type, the standard reaction is to accept what the "computer" says. Since systems that are flexible, allow for natural language querying, forgive errors in entry, and can decipher what a person wants even if he himself doesn't know, have yet to be placed in the average library, assistance from a real, flesh and blood, helpful librarian is essential. Furthermore, librarians have to be very assertive in convincing clients that people are still smarter than machines.

Public librarians, especially, face a very real dilemma when it comes to biblio-graphic instruction. Except for children's and young adult specialists who often provide reference-skills workshops for visiting classes, or who simply integrate user education into their daily routines, many public service librarians who serve adult clientele offer library instruction in a hit-or-miss fashion.
In reality most people come to libraries hoping for answers to their questions without having to go through bibliographic basic training. Public librarians need to develop a philosophy that allows for user education to be a routine aspect of what the library offers and further to develop the marketing techniques to make it palatable for the public. Available documentation (Harris, 1989) indicates that public librarians may endorse the concept of bibliographic instruction but are inconsistent in following through with regular programs of user education.

Further evidence of a lack of organized commitment to ongoing user education in public libraries is found in a survey of public libraries in the state of Washington (Sass, 1991). As part of a biannual survey of information technology available in public, academic, special and governmental libraries, the Library Planning & Development Division of the Washington State Library asked more than 300 libraries to respond to questions relating to staff designated as trainers of other staff or library clientele, methods used in training, and whether a written training policy for either staff or clients was available. 122 libraries answered the survey, including 46 of the 70 public libraries in the state. Of these, the majority indicated that there were staff designated as trainers to other staff in some aspect of library automation. Descriptions of training ranged from informal, one-on-one sessions to more formalized sessions presented to groups. In some cases similar training was made available to library users. However, no written training policies appear to exist. Further, a plan for training clients was apparent in none of the responses. While librarians are aware of the need for user education, they have yet to take action, even in the form of a "philosophy statement" endorsing such training. If it can be assumed that libraries have in place some sort of automation plan for applications that will be available for public use, it would be reasonable to assume that even a brief policy on instruction should exist.

Effective training is time and labor intensive. Setting aside the hours to plan training sessions are a Herculean task for most librarians, especially when faced with immediate demands from staff and clients. It is doubly difficult because of the ambivalent attitudes of both users and staff. While the above examples show that staff is aware of the need, there is also evidence that many librarians balk when placed in the role of teacher (Harris, 1989). If this reluctance to teach can be overcome, a flexible training plan can be developed fairly easily and will in the long run save headaches, heartaches and hassles.

1. DEVELOPING A MODEL TRAINING PROGRAM

Whether designing "train the trainer" models for other staff, or programs to be delivered directly to clients, a librarian must have a clear understanding of a variety of factors including the various types of adult learning behavior, her own behavior as a trainer (training style), and how to integrate individual styles into a training package. It is also necessary to look at the nature of computer training itself and to translate sensitivity about clients' resistance to dealing with computers. Technophobia is very real. It is essential when designing a training program to remember that flexibility and patience are the two most importance attributes one can possess.
Training sessions with staff will be more effective if they directly approach some of the misgivings or negative attitudes that staff may have toward training users. It would be worthwhile to integrate into a training session the following points, especially if a new service or automated application is still in the planning stage:

Advance warning. Allow staff time to adjust to the idea of a new program or service, and the opportunity to use it freely before it is implemented. Provide articles or anecdotes from other libraries that already use a system, product or service. If possible, provide staff with a "field trip" to view it first hand.

Discuss people's worst fears about training the public. They need to "know the enemy."

Look beyond the professional staff for your trainers. Sometimes the most effective trainers will be from unlikely sources.

Develop a team approach to the training issue. Encourage people to share successes and failures. Acceptance and resulting changes will be easier to implement.

Be flexible enough to make changes in the training program. The secret to dynamic training methods is to be aware of the little things that may serendipitously turn up and to have the wisdom to use them.

The following examples will serve to illustrate the areas a trainer might cover in a work-shop designed for staff who will later train clients to use the library's online public access catalog and CD-ROM work stations. The expected result is that public service staff will be able to respond to the unique needs of a wide range of clients.

2. LEARNING STYLES

A variety of published tools exist to help trainers assess learning styles. A caveat must be issued at this point, however. While many inventories are available that provide insight into people's personalities, there is potential for misuse. A brief, yet practical summary, "Training and learning styles" (American Society for Training and Development, 1988) describes various learning style inventories and provides valuable information for assessing both learning and training behaviors. In addition it must be remembered that while using a learning style inventory might be very useful for training staff with whom the trainer will have an ongoing relationship, it is probably not practical for a one-time session with clients. It is far better for a trainer to have a general understanding of various learning styles and behaviors and use observation and discussion to identify client preferences.

Learning behavior can be broken down into three basic categories: visual, aural and kinesthetic (Markova, 1991). In planning a training session, a trainer must be aware that a group will comprise all three types, and that in fact, all people possess all three traits to some degree. Thus, the training will need to incorporate ways to appeal to the variety of learning styles. Since no trainer can count on having only one type of learner in a training session, it is necessary to be prepared. Components that would be included in a broad-based training session might include,
slides, or videos for visual learners, lecture-discussion for aural learners and hands-on opportunities for kinesthetic learners. Careful observation and experience will assist the trainer in developing training sessions that will be of most benefit to the largest number of participants.

Learning behavior includes three additional components as well. Depending on the person, as well as the content of the instructional material, learning styles can be characterized as dependent, collaborative, and independent. These behaviors or styles need the following elements to achieve success:

Dependent - found when material is unfamiliar. Learner needs structure, encouragement, reinforcement. Trainer needs to exhibit authority and expertise.

Collaborative - may occur when learner has some knowledge, information or ideas and wants to try them out. Trainer will serve as facilitator and explore information interactively.

Independent - learner has skill or knowledge and wants to enrich his information. Learner needs time to explore new avenues and needs nonjudgmental support from trainer. Trainer will provide feedback and additional resources rather than teaching.

3. TRAINING STYLES

As with learning styles, various inventories exist to assist trainers in identifying their own training styles (American Society for Training and Development, 1991). Richard Bostrom (American Society for Training and Development, 1988) developed a system for identifying four training styles and the behaviors associated with them. These include:

Behaviorist - provides well-designed structure, shapes new behavior, engineers a process to allows learners to reach specific goals. Product oriented.

Structuralist - feeds well-organized information in small increments to learners, inflexible. Sequence oriented.

Functionalist - practical, problem focused, impatient with slow learners.

Achievement-task oriented.


While the examples have been greatly simplified, they serve to provide an overview and will assist in developing a certain level of self awareness.

In addition to cultivating an awareness of one's own training style, a trainer must also be aware of the necessity to lead others when appropriate, to maintain a sense of humor and to be aware of behavior that might impede the learning process.
4. TRAINING ADULT LEARNERS

Whether training staff who will later transfer the information to clients, or directly training clients, several points should be considered. As a philosophy for training adult users is developed, it is necessary to keep in mind an element of adult learning known as "indexing" (Masie, 1989). Work with adult learners shows that people retain information best when it is incorporated into previous life experiences. As a new subject is learned, an adult may store the information in a "buffer" zone, much the way a computer stores information in a temporary fashion, only incorporating into long-term memory that information which is seen as important or essential. This in part has to do with the idea that adults incorrectly fear that as their brains age they have only so much memory to spare and do not want to waste precious space. While data exists to counter this idea, old myths die hard. Masie's indexing theory may further prove the notion that one can indeed teach an old dog new tricks.

When planning a training program for adults, the following points need to be considered:

- Adults prefer to learn when the information seems to be essential to some aspect of their lives
- Adult learners are often task-oriented, preferring to learn the skills necessary to problem solve
- Adult learners must see the information as essential, a means to an end
- Participant input is important to the learning process
- Adult learners' prior experience needs to be incorporated into the learning process; a meaningful relationship between new information and previous knowledge must be established
- Evaluation of the session is essential; it reinforces what has been learned and provides valuable feedback to the instructor to enable for modification