

The Message Educator

issue 4, 2014

6898

The number of professionals, instructors, and students who took part in ABMP's Massage Business Superhero Summit.



Created by Associated Bodywork & Massage Professionals • [philosophy for instructors](#)

How's YOUR INSTRUCTIONAL CLARITY?

Instructional clarity is defined as “the teacher’s ability to effectively stimulate the desired meaning of course content and processes in the minds of students through the use of appropriately structured verbal and nonverbal messages.”¹ Put simply, instructional clarity is the ability of a teacher to present information in a way that students understand. The research on teacher effectiveness has consistently found that instructional clarity is associated with higher levels of student achievement, enhanced motivation levels, and student satisfaction with educational programs.²

WHAT NOT TO DO

In a study to determine what decreases instructional clarity, researchers found that inexperienced teachers made a common mistake; they tried to cover too much content and give too many details.³ This tendency seems to stem from credibility worries. When interviewed, those new to teaching believed they appeared more authoritative when they provided detailed lectures. Students, however, quickly became overwhelmed and then bored. Experienced teachers tend to focus on the most important content and place it in a meaningful progression, regularly connecting it with information already familiar to students.

An Artful Idea

Use this exercise to help students recognize movement in everything around them, while determining which muscles are contracting and lengthening to maintain various postures.

Ask each student to bring in a favorite image—a painting, a photo, a comic book graphic, or a CD or magazine cover. The only stipulation: the graphic must include people. Break students into pairs. Have one student act out the movements shown in the image. The other student’s assignment is to record the movements (abduction of the glenohumeral joint, extension of the coxal joint, etc.).



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INSTRUCTIONAL CLARITY BEHAVIORS

Researchers regularly describe three broad behavior clusters that outline the behaviors of teachers with high levels of instructional clarity. They are:

- **Verbal clarity**, including presentation skills, verbal fluency, the ability to give explanations, and the use of examples and real-life cases.
- **Structural clarity**, where teachers use best practices for structuring and delivering content including previews, organization of concepts, transitions, links to previously learned material, summaries, reviews, outlines, flow charts, graphic organizers, illustrations, and visual aids.
- **Process clarity**, where teachers understand how best to emphasize aspects of content, provide relevant content, ensure curriculum build and flow, and assess and respond to student learning challenges.

It is also important to remember that adult learners often pursue learning to build new skills and advance in the workplace. In *Enhancing Adult Motivation to Learn* (Jossey-Bass, 2008), author Raymond Wlodkowski points out that adult learners have some specific needs related to instructional clarity. They are pragmatic students who are looking for solutions to real-life problems. Unnecessary theoretical content may leave them thinking, “Don’t waste my time,” “Why should I care about this?” or “Are you kidding me? Get me out of here!” For this reason, instructional clarity includes regular explanations about why the information is important and can help the learner meet important life goals.

Teachers with instructional clarity tend to naturally follow a particular teaching progression. First, they provide the big picture (“This is where we are trying to get in our learning today.”). Next, they define key words and terms, extract broad concepts, and provide a structure for the information before filling in important details. Personal experiences and stories are used to tie information to real-life examples so that students know why they should care and how the information will support their efforts to work in the massage profession.

Demonstration of instructional clarity is a direct reflection of content expertise. If you don’t know it and know it well, you can’t teach it well.⁴ Too often, new teachers are asked to manage classrooms on topics that are outside their area of proficiency. If you are worried about your level of aptitude in a particular topic, explore your degree of comfort with these statements:

- I understand this topic to the degree that I can explain it to myself logically in my own words. I don’t have to read any of the lecture material from note cards.
- I can give at least two good examples (a story, fact, personal experience, piece of research, or analogy) for each key concept I’m teaching.
- I can personally and proficiently demonstrate any hands-on skill I am teaching on more than one region of the body.

Recommendations from experts advise teachers to work at mastering content to increase feelings of confidence, and then build communication skills so materials are presented fluidly. Finding a teaching mentor, such as an experienced teacher or a content expert, to support improvement is also useful. It is also important to recognize that instructional clarity is just one piece of a complex puzzle and that other skills also come into play.⁵ 🍏

NOTES

1. J. L. Chesebro, “Teaching Clearly,” in *Communication for Teachers* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 2002).
2. D. Lane, “Communication with Students to Enhance Learning,” accessed November 2014, <http://www.education.com/reference/article/communication-with-students-to-enhance/>.
3. J. D. Feezel and S. A. Myers, “Assessing Graduate Assistant Teacher Communication,” *Communication Quarterly* 45, no. 3, (1997): 110–124.
4. A. B. Frymier, “Making Content Relevant to Students,” in *Communication for Teachers* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 2002).
5. R. J. Wlodkowski, *Enhancing Adult Education to Learn*, revised edition (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1999).

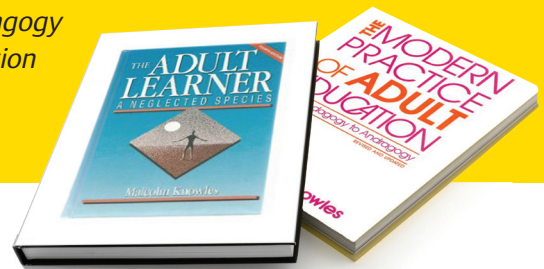


HELPFUL INSIGHTS INTO ADULT LEARNERS

Malcolm Knowles, PhD (1913–1997), the executive director of the Adult Education Association of the USA in the 1950s, was the first person to formally develop a distinctive conceptual basis for adult education and learning. While there are a number of emerging ideas about the best ways to motivate and teach adult learners, many of Knowles' ideas remain helpful. He tells us that:

- Adults need to know why they need to learn something. Make sure adult learners understand why they should care about a particular concept. Make it relevant and personal to each individual learner's life and goals.
- Adults need to learn experientially and so instruction should be task-oriented instead of memorization-based whenever possible.
- Adults approach learning as problem solving, and respond well to scenario-based learning and the use of case studies.
- Adults learn best when they believe the topic is of immediate value.
- Adults need to be involved in planning and evaluating their instruction. Provide adults with some choices about what and how they learn. Regularly ask for their feedback about lectures, demonstrations, and activities.

To learn more about Knowles and his theories on adult education, you might read some of his works including *The Modern Practice of Adult Education* (Prentice Hall, 1980), *The Adult Learner: A Neglected Species* (Gulf Publishing, 1990), or *Andragogy in Action: Applying Modern Principles of Adult Education* (Jossey Bass, 1984).

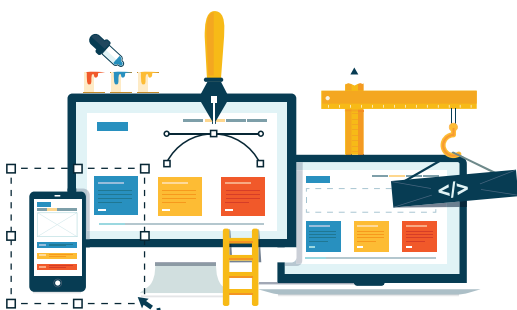


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