Module 4-
Understanding Learning Styles

Field Instructor Training
Department of Social Work- Field Education Office
Learning Objectives

1. To understand the impact that learning styles have on the relationship between the Field Instructor and the student.
2. To understand the types of learning styles and their characteristics.
3. To assist Field Instructors in identifying and developing strategies that adapt to the student’s learning style.
Elements of Effective Learning/Teaching

Field Instructors are not only supervisors and mentors, they are teachers. Research has shown that adapting teaching to the student’s learning style has a positive influence on the perceptions of the field placement experience. This influence also has a positive impact on the Field Instructor’s perception of the experience.\(^a\) By recognizing the student’s learning style early in the placement, the Field Instructor takes the first step in ensuring the student has a positive learning experience in the agency. There are many adult learning theories. This module will provide a broad overview of these theories and resources for the Field Instructor to expand their knowledge.

\(^a\) Itzhaky & Eliahou, 2001; Raschick, Maypole, & Day, 1998; Van Soest & Kruzich, 1994.
Principles of Adult Learning

- Adults need to be self-directed in learning activities.
  - The Learning Plan provides the Field Instructor and student the opportunity to negotiate what activities will address the learning goals.
  - Field Instructors should encourage and empower students to be autonomous in accomplishing tasks.

- Adults are active learners. That is, they prefer to learn through experience.
  - Field is the place where students integrate classroom learning into action. Field Instructors should request a copy of the course syllabi in order to gauge the student’s comprehension of theory and to evaluate how the student translates that into skill.
  - Orientations and trainings should be scheduled in ways that do not interrupt the student’s access to involvement in client interactions.
Principles of Adult Learning, cont.

- Adults motivation to learn is derived from what they perceive to be applicable to their lives and to have real value.
  - Students need to believe that the work that they do in the field agency will be relevant and applicable to their employment after graduation.
  - Field Instructors who help students understand the relevancy of the learning tasks to “real life” social work will enhance the student’s investment in the learning process.
Principles of Adult Learning, cont.

- Adult learners need to immediately practice the new information they have learned.
  - Field Instructors should provide the student with opportunities to role play new techniques or skills.
  - Field Instructors should limit the amount of “shadowing” a student will do before allowed to perform the task.
  - Structured learning opportunities allow students to progress in skill development and build confidence.

Dettlaff, 2003 as adapted from Knowles, 1970.
Learning Style Characteristics

This learning module will present the basics of learning styles and their characteristics. For those interested in more advanced models, Kolb’s Learning Theory (Kolb, 1984) and Gardner’s Theory of Multiple Intelligences (Gardener, 1983; 2000) are recommended.

Three learning styles are generally agreed upon: visual, auditory, and kinesthetic. It will be important for the accomplished Field Instructor to know their own style as well as be able to assess that of their student(s). Field Instructors will have the opportunity to identify their own learning style at the end of this module.
Visual Learners

- Learn by seeing and looking.
- Tend to take notes.
- Like to see what they are learning.
- Often sit up front in the classroom or seminar.
- May close their eyes to visualize a concept.
- Like illustrations and presentations that use color.
- Find something to watch if they are bored.
- Prefer written instructions.
- Utilize observation to learn new skills.
Auditory Learners

- Need to hear information in order to retain it.
- May appear to not be paying attention, but are listening.
- Prefer verbal instructions.
- Process through discussion.
- Enjoy group interactions and discussions.
- Remember through verbal repetition.
Kinesthetic Learners

- Learn by experience.
- Learn by participation.
- Retain information that they have experienced.
- Enjoy role playing.
- Enjoy learning activities that involve active participation.
- Frequently use their hands or gestures in conversation.
- Need to be active and take frequent breaks.
Teaching Strategies

- **Visual Learners**
  - Provide a variety of visual materials.
  - The visual student will appreciate reading materials that help them learn about the agency, the client population and intervention methods.
  - Demonstrate how something is done.
  - Allow students opportunities to observe others.
  - Encourage note taking.
  - Provide a quiet space for students to work/document.
Teaching Strategies, cont.

- **Auditory Learners**
  - Repeat important points to cement understanding.
  - Ask students to tell you in their own words their understanding of a concept, theory or skill.
  - Encourage discussion and invite questions.
  - Encourage students to talk to other staff/social workers about the job responsibilities.
  - It may help this student to read instructions aloud to ensure understanding.
Teaching Strategies, cont.

- **Kinesthetic Learners**
  - Provide opportunities for the student to get involved quickly.
  - Use role play liberally.
  - Understand that the student may need more frequent breaks or the freedom to move about.
  - Opportunities to prepare and present information to the larger group are rich learning activities for this student.
  - Provide student opportunities to have client contact as soon as ready.
Know Your Own Learning Style

- **When you read do you:**
  A. Enjoy descriptive passages and visualize the scene
  B. Enjoy dialogue and hear the characters in your mind
  C. Prefer action scenes, but do not enjoy reading

- **When you learn something new, do you:**
  A. Like to read instructions or see demonstrations
  B. Prefer verbal instructions
  C. Jump in and learn by doing it

- **When you are spelling an unfamiliar word, do you:**
  A. Visualize the word in your mind
  B. Sound the word out as you spell it
  C. Write the word down first
Know Your Own Learning Style, cont.

- When you want to relax, do you:
  A. Watch TV or read
  B. Listen to music
  C. Play a game or exercise

- When you are concentrating, do you:
  A. Get distracted by messy surroundings
  B. Get distracted by noise
  C. Get distracted by activity around you

- When you are trying to figure out how someone is feeling, do you:
  A. Look at their facial expressions
  B. Listen to the sound of their voice
  C. Look at their body movements
Know Your Own Learning Style, cont.

- When you teach someone something new, do you:
  A. Show them what to do or write down instructions
  B. Tell them what to do
  C. Do it with them

- When you compliment someone on their work, do you:
  A. Write them a note
  B. Tell them they did a good job
  C. Shake their hand or pat them on the back

- When you are bored, do you:
  A. Look around or doodle
  B. Talk to yourself
  C. Move around or fidget
Know Your Own Learning Style, cont.

- When you need to remember something, do you:
  A. Write it down
  B. Say it to yourself over and over
  C. Think about it while moving around

- When you are giving directions, do you:
  A. Draw a map
  B. Give clear and detailed instructions
  C. Point and use body language to explain the directions

- When you are putting something together, do you:
  A. Read the instructions first
  B. Prefer to have someone tell you what to do
  C. Figure it out as you do it

Dettlaff, 2003 as adapted from Rose, 1985.
Know Your Own Learning Style

- Add up all the A’s
- Add up all the B’s
- Add up all the C’s

- If you had mostly A’s you are a Visual Learner
- If you had mostly B’s you are an Auditory Learner
- If you had mostly C’s you are a Kinesthetic Learner
- You may have similar #s in two or more areas, indicating a mixed learning style
- Mixed styles are common and these learners utilize strategies from each style to optimize understanding and retention
Activity

- On a separate document:
  - Write your name
  - Write your agency
  - Write the date

- Indicate your Learning Style

- Discuss various learning activities that you can or have provided students with each of the three learning styles (Visual, Auditory, Kinesthetic)

- Email the completed document (as an attachment) to: cford@fullerton.edu

- Move on to Module 5!
References
