

CHAPTER 2

Learning

This chapter provides an overview of how adults learn, what motivates learners and how to identify a learning gap.

Definition of 'learning'

In this resource one general, broad definition is used to reflect all aspects of the term 'learning':

A change in personal behaviour which results from experience, the gaining of knowledge and the development of understanding.

In any learning situation, both the learner and the Trainer have a role to play. The learner has the responsibility for making her own long-term choices about how and when she gains experience and why. The Trainer's role is to help the learner gain the knowledge and understanding she needs in the short term. She does this by designing and providing a range of learning experiences for the learner that will lead to a change in behaviour of benefit in some way to the quality of guiding. Evaluation is used to assess whether this has occurred.

To decide what to provide and how to provide it, the Trainer first has to identify the learning gap (the one between what the learner needs to know, understand and then do and what she currently knows, understands and can do).

In the context of the specific subject matter for the training session, the Trainer needs to:

- identify the knowledge, skills and/or the awareness needed from the session by the learners
- link it to Girlguiding's Educational Framework.

Then to help the learner to learn, the Trainer needs to design the training showing that she understands and has taken into account:

- styles of learning - and why Girlguiding encourages 'learning by doing' in particular
- the difference between how adults and children learn
- what motivates learners to learn
- ways to recognise learners' preferences for how they like to take in information
- how to create the physical environment to support learning
- how to tell whether the training has achieved what it needed to for the learners.

Evaluation

Knowing how to identify and meet the need will allow a Trainer to design a training activity or a longer learning session that is most likely to meet those learning needs, which in turn will fill the learning gap.

LEARNING STYLES

An understanding of learning styles for adults and children and how they both learn, and also being able to tell which is the preferred style for your learners is the foundation of a Trainer's skill.

A model that is most often used in training practice for this is Kolb's 'Learning Styles and Experiential Learning Model', often referred to as 'The learning cycle'.

To understand individual people's different learning styles, David Kolb, an American educationist, developed a theory based on a four-stage cycle of learning, which sets out four distinct learning styles, or preferences.

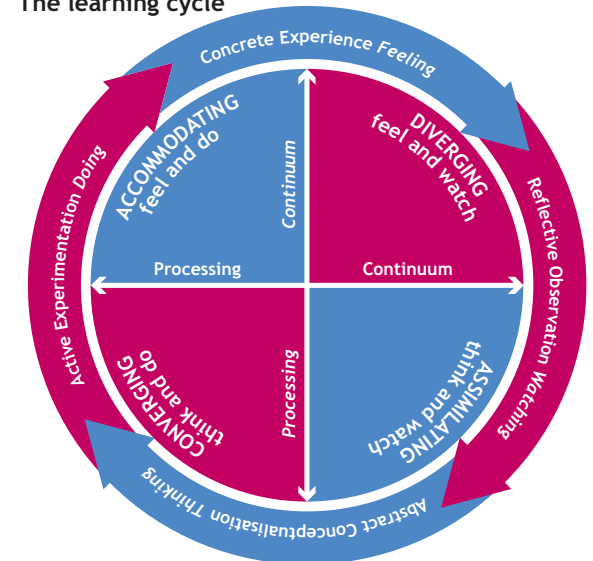
Kolb's four-stage learning cycle consists of:

- immediate or concrete experiences, followed by
- observations and reflections, which can become
- abstract concepts, which enable
- actions that can be actively tested.

Kolb's theory

Kolb says that ideally this process represents a learning cycle or spiral, such that the learner moves round all four 'bases', that is, a cycle of experiencing, observing and reflecting, thinking and acting. Immediate or concrete experiences lead to observations and reflections. These reflections are then assimilated (absorbed and translated) into abstract concepts with implications for action, which the learner can actively test and experiment with, which in turn enables the creation of new experiences.

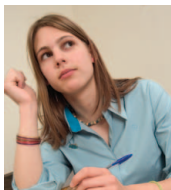
The learning cycle



In a training situation, the Trainer provides the learner with a number of experiences - for example, games, discussions, presentations, case studies and demonstrations. The learner participates and then reflects on what she has experienced, either to herself or out loud by talking about her experience with the Trainer and/or the other learners present.



As a result, the learner develops some thoughts and views about that experience - for example, she really likes it, it helped her understand how to do something better, it made her want to try it for herself, and so on.



And then she acts - for example, by choosing to do more of it, trying it herself, or adapting what she experienced to suit a situation better. This part will be up to the learner - but as the Trainer your contribution is to provide the experience that sooner or later leads to the action.

And the more the learner acts, the more she is adding to her experience, increasing her knowledge and developing her understanding - she is learning.

Kolb's is a general model for the value of experiential learning, which is usually more powerful and effective than just telling a learner what she needs to know. It is therefore very useful when thinking about how you approach training in general.

The model might suggest, though, that this is the order in which learning has to happen. However, in practice, because learners are individuals, each will come with her own variation of learning style.

Learners who prefer a concrete experience as their starting point can't think of anything worse than 'taking a moment to reflect...'. This learner knows what she wants to do, how and why, so she would be far rather up and doing. They'll be the lively ones in your session - sometimes a little disruptive to others - and maybe a little less likely to understand until they have experienced and then reflected.

Others like to start with reflective observation first, think and then act. They are people who are often quiet by nature, and are rarely the first to speak. But when they do speak, having thought about it first - even if only for a couple of seconds, they often contribute the most useful content to a discussion, or ask exactly the right question.

Other learners need to start with the thinking part first - 'How does this work? Why is that so? How does this apply to me?' - before they can get to the acting, experiencing and reflecting stages. This is particularly true for children, who are still building their personal banks of knowledge and information.

And some learners start the learning cycle at 'active experimentation'. They like to find their own way, experimenting or acting first, and then having had their concrete experience, are readier to reflect. This perhaps is the person who prefers to make the flatpack furniture before looking at the instructions...



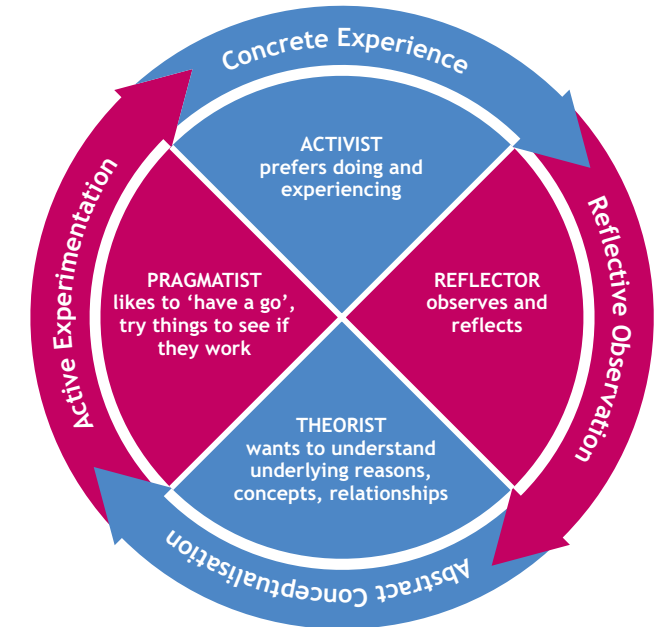
So, if you are designing a learning activity for an individual, when you first meet her spend a little time noticing how she likes to learn and be ready to adapt your plan and/or training methods to fit.

And when designing a learning activity for a group, keep in mind that you will have all four types of learning style and preference among the learners, to varying degrees of obviousness. Your plan will need to include ways to favour each of the styles within the time available.

A variation of the Kolb cycle was devised by academics Peter Honey and Alan Mumford, who took the Kolb model and gave the four kinds of learners new names:

- activist
- reflector
- theorist
- pragmatist.

Honey and Mumford: Typology of learners



THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN HOW ADULTS AND CHILDREN LEARN

Anyone who works with children knows that there are important differences in the way adults and children learn.

As a Trainer for Girlguiding you might encounter not only a broad range of learning styles in adult members, you might also be asked to work with a group of Young Leaders or other members of The Senior Section, or perhaps help run an event for Guide Patrol Leaders or Brownie Sixers, and therefore you will need to adapt your training to the learning needs of the particular age group.

Young children (around nine and below):

- rely on others to decide what is important to be learned
- accept the information being presented at face value
- expect what they are learning to be useful in their long-term future
- have little or no experience upon which to draw, and are relatively 'blank slates'
- have little ability to serve as a knowledgeable resource to the teacher or peers.



The development of the child

An example of a child development theory is the Montessori one, based on the work of the educationist Maria Montessori. She started to develop her philosophy and methods for developing and teaching children in 1897. She realised that by observing children at play and experimenting with the environment, materials and lessons available to them, we have an understanding of what is important for a child's development.



Our response when working with young members of Girlguiding is to understand that children as learners:

- have something special (a natural spirituality) that can change the world
- thrive on structure
- learn through their senses
- need freedom
- are excellent at absorbing the culture around them
- are process driven rather than result driven.

Allow them to explore and enjoy their natural curiosity, be aware of your considerable impact on them - in what you say and what you do, and make the learning fun!

Adolescents (around ten and above) and adults:

- are more able and willing to decide for themselves what is important to be learned
- need to validate the information based on their beliefs and values
- expect what they are learning to be immediately useful.

In addition, adults:

- have substantial experience upon which to draw, and may have fixed viewpoints
- have significant ability to serve as a knowledgeable resource to the Trainer and other learners.



WHAT MOTIVATES LEARNERS

By the time the learners arrive in the training room the Trainer will already have given a lot of thought to the practical aspects of the training process - the planning, design and preparation of the training's content and resources.

This is essential, but on the day it is just as important for the Trainer to notice the subtle things. How are the learners feeling? Are their surroundings creating a good environment for learning? Do the learners want to be there?

Perhaps the most important contribution the Trainer can make is to build this 'on the day' awareness into her thinking and planning so that the design and the delivery together result in learners being interested, informed, engaged and having fun.

Making your training session interesting, informative, friendly and fun isn't just good practice - it also helps the learner to feel valued, by knowing that you relate to her, understand her, and want her to learn from the session.

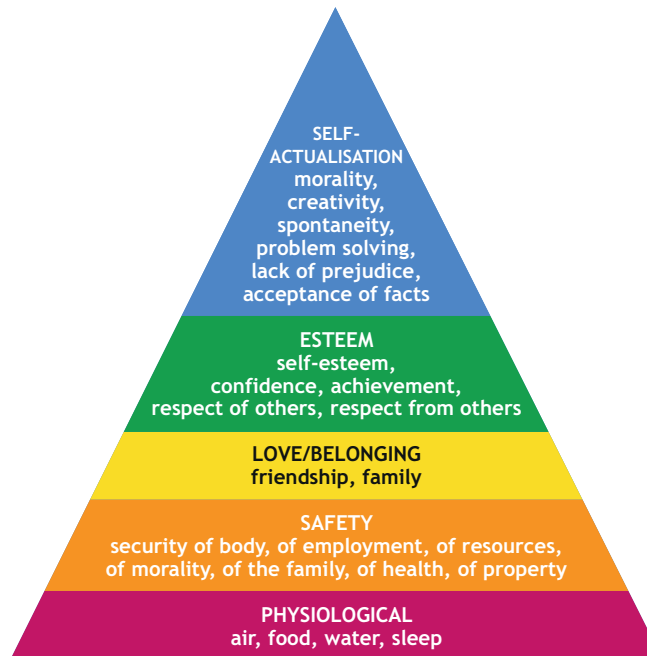
This is engagement in action. The way you plan in the time to interact with the learner, whether she is an individual or in a group, is what connects her to you and motivates her to learn. It is a big part of making learning a positive experience and, most importantly, makes it more likely that the learner will retain the learning and make use of it afterwards.

The most well-known theory explaining what motivates learners is that developed by Abraham Maslow.

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Abraham Maslow developed the Hierarchy of Needs model in the USA in the 1940s and 50s. It is a theory that remains valid today for understanding human motivation, management training and personal development.

In the diagram it is clear that our physiological needs should be met first; then we need to ensure our safety, and so on.



As a Trainer, meeting basic **physiological** or survival needs is paramount: you do so every time you open a window in the training room when it is too hot, or ask for the heating to be turned up if it is too cold; when you stop for a tea break because you can see concentration is flagging or the learners are thirsty; and when at a residential event you call a halt to the Saturday evening session because you can see how tired people are. You will have experienced how hard it is to motivate anyone to do anything if they are cold, tired or hungry.

Then come **safety** needs - to be protected from the elements, to live feeling secure, with law and order prevailing, in a stable home. In a training setting, your priority should be to keep the learners safe while they are with you, and this is why there are links to health and safety guidelines throughout this resource.



After survival and safety comes the need to **belong and be loved**. This need is about relationships and is why humans gather in family groups, form communities, join organisations and clubs, and have a strong affiliation with a work group or profession. In Girlguiding there are many examples of how we understand and act on meeting this need. We structure guiding around units, Sixes, Patrols, committees and teams - and being in them gives members a sense of belonging. And it is why we make time in learning activities for conversations, and sharing and networking.

Then there are **esteem** needs - to experience self-esteem, met through a combination of achievement, mastery, independence, status, prestige and managerial responsibility. These stem from the need to feel that progress has been made, and effort and achievement acknowledged and recognised. The pride you can see in the face of the Guide who is made a Patrol Leader for the first time, or the Rainbow who wins a prize in the fancy dress competition are both examples of girls responding to having their need for self-esteem met. In the training environment the Trainer responds to this need in subtle but very important ways with the learners - thanking them for a contribution, praising achievement, and stepping back when she no longer is needed by the learners.

The highest level of need - called '**self-actualisation**' by Maslow - is about realising personal potential and self-fulfilment, and seeking personal growth and peak experiences. It connects to the faith you have in your God and your belief in where our potential and talent comes from. In training, you satisfy this by giving learners a safe environment and stimuli to explore their own spirituality.

HOW LEARNERS LIKE TO TAKE IN INFORMATION

An understanding of the different ways in which learners prefer to take in information - and perhaps how they might differ from your own preferences - will be essential at the stage when you are designing a learning event and choosing learning activities.

Acquiring knowledge, in order to learn (whether by acting, observing and reflecting, thinking or experimenting),

can happen in several ways. The ‘Multiple Intelligences’ work by American academic Howard Gardner describes seven different preferences for taking in information for learning. Knowing what they are will help you as a Trainer to choose which methods work best and what resources you could use.

Visual-Spatial

These learners think in terms of physical space, as do architects and sailors. They are very aware of their environment. They like to draw, do jigsaw puzzles, read maps and daydream. They can learn through drawings and verbal and physical imagery.

Helpful training resources for such learners include models, graphics, charts, photographs, drawings, 3D models, DVD/ video, video conferencing, television, multimedia and texts with pictures/charts/graphs.

Bodily-Kinaesthetic

These learners use their body to express themselves and have a keen sense of body awareness. They like movement, making things and touching. They communicate well through body language and learn through physical activity, hands-on learning, acting and role playing.

Training methods appropriate for them include creating opportunities to move around during the session and resources include using equipment and real objects.

Aural-Musical

These learners show a strong awareness of rhythm and sound. They love music, and they are also sensitive to sounds in their environments. They may learn more easily with music in the background, and they might like to turn information into lyrics, speak rhythmically, tap out time.

Resources for them include musical instruments, music, radio, CD, multimedia.



Social-Interpersonal

These learners learn through interaction. They consider themselves to have many friends, respond to the moods, emotions, motivations and actions of others, and show empathy to individuals. They can learn best through being in a group, team-building activities, seminars and dialogue.

Ways of learning can include working in small groups, audio conferencing, talking on the telephone, having time and attention from the Trainer, video conferencing, social networking and email.

Solitary-Intrapersonal

These learners understand themselves well and don’t necessarily need to learn with others. They’re in tune with their inner feelings and may be seen as being confident and having a strong will and opinions. They can learn through independent study and reflection.

Training resources for them include books, creative materials, personal diaries, privacy and time to think. These people are the most independent of the learners.

Verbal-Linguistic

These learners use words effectively. They have highly developed auditory skills and often think in words. They like reading, writing, playing word games and making up poetry or stories. Generally they can easily remember names, dates and places. They learn best by saying and seeing words.

Training resources include computers, games, multimedia, books, audio recorders and the spoken word (lecture and instruction).

Logical-Mathematical

These learners think in concepts, and are able to see and explore patterns and relationships. They like to experiment and enjoy solving puzzles, and will ask big and/or complex questions.

They can be taught through logic games, investigations and mysteries. They need to learn and form concepts before they can deal with details.

Clearly, these intelligences are not mutually exclusive - it is possible to have lots of friends **and** love music!

Although you might notice in a learner what seems to be a stronger preference for one or two of the seven intelligences, in practice learners will usually have something of all of the seven intelligences in them. So when you first meet learners it might not be obvious what their learning preferences are. For example, although we are increasingly energised and excited by the possibilities

of IT and a variety of media in training, some learners still prefer to or need to learn or get their information from a book. Understanding why this might be will help identify the intelligence they are using.

- If it’s because they like the feel of a book’s pages and cover, and like to make notes in the margin or stick notes on the pages, they could be showing **kinaesthetic intelligence**.
- If they need to be able to scan through all of it before they go back to read the specific section they wanted, they could be showing **logical-mathematical intelligence**.
- If they need to see how the chapters of the book relate to each other, they could be showing **visual-spatial intelligence**.
- If it’s because they want to control the speed and pace of their reading, and having the pages readily available in one place, in a book, helps them do this, they could be showing **solitary-intrapersonal intelligence**.
- If it’s because they like the sound of turning pages, they could be showing **aural-musical intelligence**.
- If it’s because they just like to read, and don’t mind how the words come to them as long as there’s enough information provided to satisfy their needs, they could be showing **verbal-linguistic intelligence**.

Perhaps the only group of learners who may actually prefer not to be given a book are those with **social-interpersonal intelligence**. In practice, of course, one observed choice doesn’t define the learner’s learning preference, but as a Trainer you should consider that you may have every type of learner in your session, and so should use resources and training methods that take account of this.

It is also useful to make sure that your own preferences do not exclude those with different learning preferences to your own.

LEARNING: THE THEORY

Although many theories and models of learning exist, they can be grouped into four broad perspectives by type.

Behaviourist - learners respond to stimuli and reinforcement of the stimuli. The Trainer leads in deciding on the learning to take place.

- **Cognitive** - the learners lead, making their own decisions and choices about what to learn.
- **Humanistic** - paying attention to the emotions and levels of motivation which affect learners' learning.
- **Social learning** - using the group process to increase the effectiveness of learning.

And there is one general theory - not quite a fifth perspective - from Howard Gardner, which says we all have multiple types of intelligence within us, to take into account when identifying how learners like to learn.



Gardner's theory

These perspectives and theories of learning are the basis of the contents of this chapter, but they are not referenced specifically as in practice they are described in many different ways by many different authors. No single perspective or theory can be **the** right one because all of them, in different combinations at different times with different learners, cause learning to happen.

There is a summary of over 50 different learning models and theories on the website below.



Learning models

CREATING A PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT THAT SUPPORTS LEARNING

Given the different learning styles people have, and the range of preferences for receiving information when learning, it is clear that not everybody likes to learn in a big group, and not everybody likes to learn alone. How can you, as a Trainer, ensure that the physical environment best suits your learners?

The main factors contributing to the physical environment are:

- group size
- resources being used
- training environment inside the room or space
- training environment outside the room or space.

Group size



If you have a big group of learners to train - anything more than eight - try to build in opportunities in your session where small group discussions can happen. And if you are training over a weekend, have some time where individuals can get away from the crowd for a while if they want to.



If you are asked to meet with a learner on a one-to-one basis, consider with her whether this is going to be the most helpful way to learn. It may be ideal for her preferences, or fine as a one-off but she might not realise herself that she is a person who learns better from the interaction of many, so it will be for you to take this into account when you are agreeing to meet.

Resources

Having too few resources for your learners can happen easily - if group numbers go up significantly on the day of the training, or during the session you notice puzzled learners and realise that you need some kind of visual aid at this point but don't have it. Bring more copies than you think you will need, and rehearse with a friend beforehand to see if there are places where an additional piece of equipment or a poster, say, would help increase understanding.

Having too many resources is a rarer situation - but if the space available to you isn't big enough to use what you have brought with ease, it is usually better not to use it.

Consider having versions of your learning materials available so they can be used as self-study resources. Not every learner can get to a central training venue - maybe her domestic circumstances don't support it, or she is unable to travel easily. Being able to supply her with a way of learning in her own time and in her own place will make a world of difference to her. Self-study can also be used before a learner comes to a more formal training session, or afterwards to help reinforce the learning.

Girlguiding also provides e-learning packages for use by members who want access to learning at a time and place to suit them.



E-learning

Choice of learning materials

Learners with enough equipment and/or the right equipment to make the craft or try out the tent pitching will enjoy the session and are more likely to learn. Not enough equipment to go round, or the wrong tools for the job, will seriously detract from a positive learning experience.

Learners who can easily see and read any visual aids will feel comfortable in your training sessions and be able to

access the information you want to give them.

Text size, colour and font choices are important to establishing the right learning environment.



Visual aids

Controlling the training environment inside the training room

What else can you do to make an empty hall or classroom full of child-sized furniture become a welcoming space for learning?

Simple things go a long way. Removing tables to create a space in the room big enough for everyone to sit together will help, as will having a circle of chairs rather than straight rows, so everyone can see everyone else and hear clearly.

Make the room more inviting and help the visual-spatial learners too by putting up some posters or temporary display materials on the wall. Or brighten up an empty space with relevant photos or projected images.

Controlling the training environment outside the room

This may be harder to achieve, but while you are setting up your training room pause briefly to listen for any noise outside, and look at the view through any windows.

Can you hear noises that may distract the learners that you can do something about?

Is bright sunlight shining into the eyes of the learners? Could what is seen happening outside be more interesting than what is happening in the room? You usually do have some choice about the direction the learners face when seated.

When planning your training, if you know you will need to have peace for some reflections, or that your group will be going to make a lot of noise, let the Training Organiser know well in advance of the event so she can allocate training spaces accordingly.

Once at the venue check that any Trainers in neighbouring rooms are aware of your plans.

HAS THE TRAINING ACHIEVED WHAT IT SET OUT TO?

Finding out the extent to which learning has taken place and whether any identified learning gap is filled during the session can be achieved in several ways. Some actions can be planned in during the design stage, such as the time for observed practice or some question and answer time - and some built in at the end of the session, such as learners completing feedback sheets for you and/or the Training Organiser.



Evaluation

GIRLGUIDING 'S EDUCATIONAL FRAMEWORK

Another crucial element in the process of establishing the learners' needs is Girlguiding's Educational Framework.

- Girlguiding believes that education does not begin or end in the classroom. Education is a lifelong process that contributes to a person's continuing development and involvement in society.
- Girlguiding also believes that it is important to recognise the value of non-formal education and the skills and competencies that people acquire outside their school or home life.
- Girlguiding enables girls and young women to develop their potential and to make a difference to the world. We seek to promote six areas of girls' and young women's development:
 - spiritual
 - social
 - emotional
 - physical
 - moral
 - intellectual.



Educational Framework



As a Trainer, before you finalise the content of a training plan and the training methods you propose to use, check if you have also in some way connected to each of these six areas of development.

They do not all apply to every session all the time, but in terms of developing your practice as a Trainer, make sure that, for example, you are not developing sessions that meet only social and physical needs and rarely move towards the spiritual and moral, or perhaps that you favour an intellectual approach to the exclusion of all others. Achieving a balance between each of them is important for the development of the learners' understanding of what guiding is and means, and for the development of Girlguiding itself.



Inclusivity

ESTABLISHING LEARNING NEEDS VERSUS IDENTIFYING THE LEARNING GAP

A Trainer usually starts to prepare a training session, once she has been given the training brief, by finding out what the gap is between what the learners coming to her session already know and/or can do and what it is they want to learn and be able to do.

Sometimes it will be possible to do this by having a conversation with or writing to the learners who are intending to come to the session.

It is more likely though that the first time the Trainer has any contact with the learners is when she welcomes them into the training session on the day or evening of the event.

In practice there are three levels of learning gap to identify.

- At the highest level there are the requirements of Girlguiding and the World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts (WAGGGS) to follow an age-appropriate programme and behave in a particular way (the Educational Framework).
- At a gradually localised level: the Country or Region for whom the Trainer trains may have a guiding development plan the Trainer's session will be helping to promote or action; the County or Division may have its own goals for learning relevant to the area for adults and the girls; or the District may want to commission a specific learning activity that meets the needs of individuals or units.
- At a personal level. Individual learners also come to learning events with their own learning gaps to fill.

It is possible to respond to a learning gap at more than one level in the same learning event. For example, a Leader-in-Training who comes to her first session about running a Guide unit will have her own personal knowledge gap met through questions answered by the Trainer. At the same time the session might also serve to meet a Leader development gap identified by Commissioners in the local area, and be part of Girlguiding's requirement to train all Leaders working with units.

Where the training brief isn't as universally understood as this, for example when a County asks a Trainer to train to a specific brief, often at events such as County Days, then the Trainer needs to have a selection of questions ready to be asked of the range of people involved in putting on the event.

Who can help the Trainer to identify the learning gap?

- The Training Organiser.
- The appropriate Commissioner/s.
- Local Advisers.
- Unit Leaders.
- Other Trainers.

- Patrol Leaders, Sixers and/or representatives from The Senior Section.
- Anyone else not listed who is affected by the learners' ability to lead/advise/participate in guiding activities.

What questions should be asked?

Questions to help establish the specific requirements of a training brief are covered in another chapter.

Establishing the training brief

Here are some of questions specifically focusing on establishing the extent of a learning gap. Not all will be appropriate to every situation, and there will be others you will wish to add.

- What do your learners need to learn?
- What do they want to learn?
- Why do they need to learn it? (What will/might happen if they don't learn?)
- At what level of understanding/ability are the learners now - beginners, somewhat experienced, very experienced?
- How urgent is it that the gap is filled?
- What do they already know/what can they already do? How do you know this? What have you seen, heard, experienced that tells you this is so?
- What learning have the learners done recently that this learning event needs to reinforce, or avoid duplicating?

The answers to at least some of these questions will help the Trainer design a training to meet some or even all of the learning gap.

Aims

This chapter has shown you the factors which affect the ability of an adult or child to learn:

- differing learning styles
- how adults and children learn
- what motivates learners to come to the training and enjoy it

- how learners prefer to receive the information that helps them learn

- the physical environment in which they are learning.

These elements form the basis for establishing learning needs, and are the 'how' of training.

The answers to questions about identifying the learning gap will shape the 'what' of training - what topic, with what content, delivered in what structure or format.

Apply this knowledge of both to help you underpin the content of your training sessions with sound choices about best practice in session design, delivery and use of resources. This will ensure the learners get the most from their learning experience.

USEFUL REFERENCES

This section puts together in one place links to models and commentaries about learning theory and learning styles for further reading. Some of them have been mentioned in the text already.

Montessori method

 www.montessori.org

Kolb model

 www.nwlink.com/~donclark/hrd/styles/kolb.html

 www.simplypsychology.org/learning-kolb.html

Maslow's hierarchy of needs


 www.businessballs.com/maslow.htm

The conscious competence ladder


 www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newlSS_96.htm

 www.businessballs.com/consciouscompetencelearningmodel.htm

Communication

 www.kaizen-training.com/tools-techniques/distinguishing-between-words-tone-and-body-language-2

Honey and Mumford

 www.brainboxx.co.uk/a2_learnstyles/pages/learningstyles.htm

 www.trainingjournal.com/blog/articles-blogs-honey-and-mumford-lsq/

Visual, auditory and kinaesthetic (VAK) learning styles

 www.businessballs.com/vaklearningstylestest.htm

 www.brainboxx.co.uk/a3_aspects/pages/VAK.htm

Howard Gardner's multiple intelligences theory

 www.businessballs.com/howardgardnermultipleintelligences.htm

Bloom's taxonomy of learning

 www.nwlink.com/~donclark/hrd/bloom.html

Belbin's team role

 www.belbin.com/

Multiple intelligences

 www.lesstutor.com/sm1.html

 www.learning-styles-online.com/overview/

 http://projects.coe.uga.edu/epltt/index.php?title=Multiple_Intelligences_and_Learning_Styles