

Elements of Effective Learning and Teaching

There are some principles of effective learning and teaching which can be applied to any learning encounter from a five minute discussion over coffee about a patient, to a full blown two hour tutorial.

1. Discover what the trainee wants to learn

Trainees learn best when the subject or patient under discussion has been identified by them as an area that they need help with. Occasionally trainees need help to identify what they want to learn within a certain topic.

Exposure to patients with particular problems, hypothetical situations, vignettes and role plays can all help trainees see what they want to learn.

2. Discover what the trainee needs to learn

Your assessment of the trainees performance may identify areas for improvement they have not recognised themselves. More commonly the trainees may feel inadequate in areas in which you feel they are thoroughly competent.

3. Negotiate the content, methods and priorities of the teaching session with the trainee.

Even short informal teaching episodes need to be negotiated. Not only the content of the session but also the time to be taken and the method to be used. If there are many areas identified as important for learning, priorities may also need to be negotiated.

4. Use appropriate methods and techniques in the teaching session

Different trainees learn best in different ways. Some prefer reading around topics, others learn best from experience with patients. The trainee's preferred style of learning needs to be taken into account, In each learning situation the teacher has responsibility to ensure that all the dimensions of a problem are explored. These may include psychological, administrative, published evidence and audit as well as an awareness of the trainees own values and attitudes to the problem. Trainees may not see enough of certain conditions so the teacher can draw out general principles from a specific situation which the trainee can apply to other situations.

5. Plans for further learning

At the end of the teaching session find out what has been learnt and what still needs to be learnt. This helps the trainee to see that progress in covering the curriculum has been made. It also provides valuable feedback to the teacher and help form plans for future learning with the trainee.

6. Throughout provide an environment and an example of good practice that reinforces learning.

This is particularly important when trainees are watching the teacher go about his/her work. The teacher not only needs to set a good example but to be able to describe its constituent parts to the trainee, indicating techniques which are helpful as well as those which are not.

7. Establish a relationship with the trainee

which is:

- practical and
- appropriate to the developmental stage of the trainee in the spectrum of dependent student to independent practitioner

8. Evaluate the teaching.