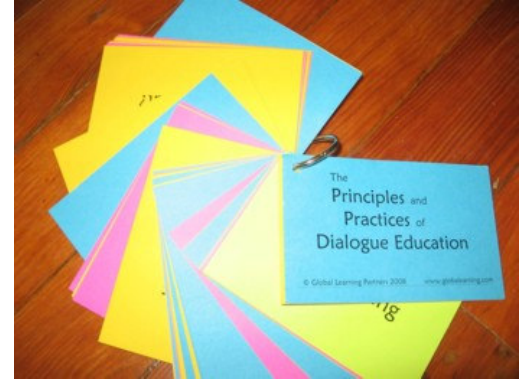


Six Ways to Assure Learning Transfer

by Jeanette Romkema, GLP Partner

Have you ever wondered whether your learners used the new content you worked so hard to teach? And, are they still using it today? I think I can safely say if you are an educator who cares about learning, you care about "learning transfer". You care about how the new content will improve your learners' life, work, relationships, health, or activities.



The transfer of learning is measured by behavior that takes place after the course or seminar or training session. Men and women get back to their workplace or community or home and begin to do what they learned: putting concepts into action and practicing new skills. These actions are indicators of transfer and can be documented and measured.

Vella, p133

Learning transfer is when newly learned content is moved into a person's life to be part of their "new normal". It is important to know that just because something is learned does not guarantee it will be transferred into the person's life and way of interacting in the world. Assuring learning is an important first step in effective teaching. Assuring *learning transfer* is the second step.

So, how can educators assure learning transfer? Below are six ways to do this. The more of these we include in our teaching practice, the greater the possibility of the newly learned content becoming part of learners' working skills, knowledge and attitudes.

1. The learners name realistic learning transfer during and at the end of the course.

It is important that learners take personal time after they learn new content to decide what they want to move into their lives and how they will do it. Although the same new content may be learned by a group of learners, each individual will decide to continue using different pieces for different reasons. What is relevant and important for one learner, may not be for another.

It is also important to plan for learners to personalize new learning throughout a course or workshop. Jane Vella calls this the "integration" part of a learning task (Vella, p117-8); Global Learning Partners teaches this as the "AWAY" – when learners name how they will use new content after it is taught and worked with. If there are four large content pieces in a day-long workshop, learners may take time to reflect on what they want to transfer four different times throughout the day. As mentioned above, learning is personal and so this must be honored with time to

reflect on the learning as soon as possible. Sharing these ideas for learning transfer with others learning the same content at the same time is also helpful.

2. The teacher has pre- and post- course contact with the learner.

Connecting with learners before a course or workshop through a Learning Needs and Resources Assessment (LNRA) can offer critical information about how to design an effective course for a particular group of learners based on what they need or want to implement after the course. It can also start the relationship with learners and teachers, letting learners know that the teacher cares enough to ask questions before the course and is available for questions and will design according to their needs. This sort of authentic planning opens the possibility for on-going resource sharing.

After a course the sharing of the course report, news related items, and resources, also speaks to the authenticity of the teacher's desire for meaningful learning and learning transfer. Students quickly know who is available for questions and support, and who is not. As learners are struggling to transfer new learning, knowing where to turn to ask a question or knowing where to find resources, can determine the success of this transfer. Teachers who open communication up before and/or after a course, are saying, "I'm here for support, if you need me."

3. The learners have tools to support their learning.

Learning tools are a great way to support learning and help learning transfer. Whether it is a rubric, template, rolodex (see image at the top of this page), or other visual representation of some kind, tools help us remember and remind us of what we learned. When something is complex these tools can be essential, but even seemingly simple content may need support to use when it is new.

Two Dialogue Education™ practitioners who train and design curriculum at World Vision Canada, swear by the use of templates. Recently they shared with me, "Every large piece of new content gets a template that learners try out and take with them." Great idea! They have discovered that tools like this help the success of their teaching and assure learning transfer. [Have a look at one I like to use.](#)

4. The learners join new communities and networks connected to the learning.

Kurt Lewin wisely named the importance of becoming part of new learning communities to support new learning. Going back to the same groups with the intention to behave, work and think differently than you did with the group before the learning, is not easy. Lewin knew there are many powerful "force-fields" that work against new learning being transferred to a person's life, so he encouraged people to work at building counter forces – positive forces that supported learning transfer.

In an attempt to help learners in this way, when Global Learning Partners teaches courses in Dialogue Education™ they encourage people to:

- register for this GLP *Voices in Dialogue* newsletter:
<http://list-manage.com/subscribe.phtml?id=933adfdb40>
- use the GLP listserv to communicate and dialogue with other Dialogue Education™ practitioners or interested people:
<http://lists.globalearning.com/mailman/listinfo/voices>

- take GLP courses as a group so you can support each other
- find ways to support and encourage colleagues that have also taken Dialogue Education™ courses.

5. The learners practice as soon and as often as possible.

The best assurance of learning transfer and permanent impact of behavior is to practice soon and practice often. The more time that passes after learning something without trying it out, testing it, or doing it “solo”, the less chance the learner will have the courage, desire or ability to be successful using the new content. As time passes, our memory of what was learned becomes unclear, doubt is more powerful, and execution seems less possible. Teachers need to assure learners leave a workshop knowing when they will try it out.

To assure learners will try out their new learning soon (and often), teachers can use the four tips outlined below:

1. Have learners name when they will try it out (in the very near future) before leaving the workshop.
2. Check with learners a few weeks after a workshop to see how their attempts are going.
3. Let learners take home a tool to assist them in trying out their new learning.
4. Have a community of learners available who support, encourage and hold learners accountable.

6. Multiple transfer locations.

If change and impact occurs as a result of a complex system of open processes, then transfer can be predicted and implemented in multiple locations: a team in the workplace, a significant individual, an entire organization or community. We sometimes fall into the trap of depending on a single-track logical sequence of “learning to transfer to impact” in a single location. Remembering the dynamism of transfer in multiple locations keeps us honest and realistic about long-term impact.

Concluding thoughts

Assuring learning transfer and lasting impact on people’s lives, work and relationships is not easy. The six steps explained in this article can help reach this goal. However, there are many variables that are at play and are out of our control: home situation, work environment, relationships. Knowing this, we should not be disheartened when despite our best efforts to maximize learning and assure learning transfer some learners take a course or workshop and change nothing in the way they are doing things. The teacher is responsible *to* the learners to assure the best learning experience possible. The teacher is not responsible *for* the learners: they, as adults, are responsible for themselves.

You as educator or trainer may never know the details of the impact your work achieved. But each tiny movement towards enhanced, responsible learning, towards peacefulness and self-respect, represents the impact of your work.

- Vella p136