ToT.5 Adult learning

To be an effective trainer it is important to understand how adults learn best and to know about the different styles of learning.

Activity 1: Principles of adult learning

Think about positive learning experiences you have had and write down in what way the experiences were positive.

Use the space below to record your reflections during the activity.

Positive learning experiences

Activity 2: Determining your preferred learning style

| Circle the statements that reflect how you learn |
|---|
| A. By following instructions step-by-step |
| B. By experiencing new things |
| C. By making mistakes |
| D. By reasoning |
| E. By understanding the theory of what is being taught |
| F. By applying what I learned |
| G. By drawing on my own experience |
| H. By watching a video |
| I. By evaluating options |
| J. By relying on my feelings |
| K. By interacting with people |
| L. By watching someone demonstrate something |
| M. By reflecting on something |
| N. By seeing the big picture |
| O. By staying on the side and watching |
| P. By listening to someone describe how to do something |
| Q. By studying what others have written about the topic |
| R. By engaging with others |
| S. By trying out what I am learning |
| T. By understanding the general principles of something |
| U. By attending a lecture |
| V. Through hands-on experience |
| W. By relying on my observations |
| X. By being personally involved in something |
| Y. By exploring how I feel about something |
| Z. By being active |
| AA. By observing the trainer |
| BB. By experimenting |
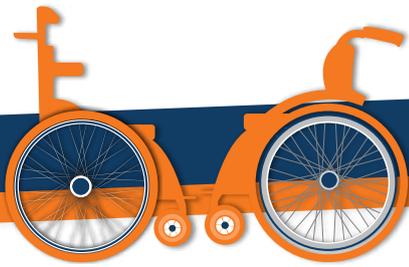
Scoring sheet for preferred learning styles

Now circle the same letters on the list. Whichever column has the most letters circled represents your preferred learning style.

If two or more have the same number it means you do not have a strong preference.

Learning by experiencing	Learning by observing	Learning by thinking	Learning by doing
B	H	D	A
G	L	E	C
J	M	I	F
K	O	N	S
R	P	Q	V
X	W	T	Z
Y	AA	U	BB
Total:	**Total:**	**Total:**	**Total:**

Experiential learning cycle
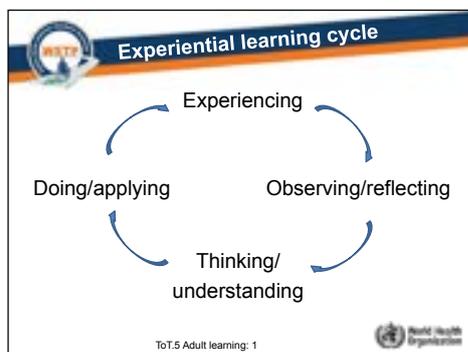
The four preferred styles of learning are:

1. Learning by experiencing
2. Learning by observing/reflecting
3. Learning by thinking/understanding
4. Learning by doing/applying.

The four learning styles match the experiential learning cycle.

While we all have different styles, learning new knowledge and skills is most effective when we go through each of the four stages.

In the WSTP, each of the four stages or types of learning are included so that all participants are involved.

- Role plays and simulations are most appropriate for those who learn best from experiencing.
- Those who learn best by observing and reflecting will benefit most from demonstrations, videos, and watching the trainer and wheelchair users.
- Presentations or reading materials that discuss concepts, provide frameworks, definitions or theories, are helpful to those who learn by thinking and understanding the big picture.
- Practical sessions with wheelchair users (as in WSTPb and WSTPi), that apply what was explained in theory, are most appropriate for those who learn by doing.

Group discussions, case studies, question-and-answer sessions, workbook assignments and feedback sessions are all teaching methods that can appeal to different learning styles; you will need to think about their purpose and how they are used to ensure they are adapted to each situation.

You also have your own preferred style. It is important to be aware of this and to take care not to neglect a particular approach.

Do not skip a phase!

What would happen if we missed out the experience part? The learning will not have a connection with the person's life; it will not be anchored in the participant's personal experience – it would be abstract.

What would happen if we missed out the observation part? The learner would not be able to explore or see how his or her personal experience connects to the larger abstract concept or framework.

What would happen if we missed out the thinking part? The learner would go from one experience to another without being able to see how they link together. He or she would not be able to benefit from a framework that would help organize the experiences in a meaningful way.

What would happen if we missed out the doing (practice) part? The learner would not find out how to apply the theory or framework in the workplace or in his or her own life.
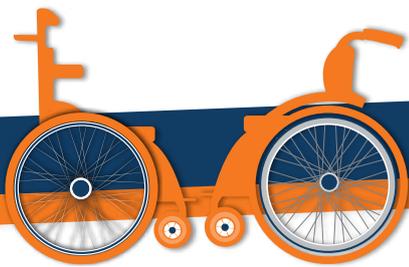
Activity 3: Matching activities with learning preferences

Put an 'x' under the name of the person who would find the training activity most effective given their learning style. Fill in the last column with your own style as a comparison.

- Carlos learns best by doing
- Miriam learns best by observing
- Sita learns best by experiencing
- Ahmad learns best by understanding the big picture.

	Carlos	Miriam	Sita	Ahmad	Self
1. Using a role play to practise wheelchair user training					
2. Watching the trainer show how to measure a new wheelchair user					
3. Attending a presentation by a government official about laws and regulations regarding wheelchair services in his or her country					
4. Watching people in wheelchairs doing the things they want to do					
5. Learning about the key documents that are relevant to wheelchair services					
6. Discussing with other participants the advantages and disadvantages of follow-up in the user's home					
7. Listening to the trainer reviewing the most important articles in the *CRPD*					
8. Making a pressure-relief cushion					
9. Riding a wheelchair to get a feel for the obstacles a wheelchair user might experience					
10. Observing the trainer conduct an assessment					
11. Doing an assessment interview with a new user					
12. Calculating the cost-savings of adding a wheelchair service to existing rehabilitation services					

Supporting adult learning

While we all have preferred learning styles, there are some common factors that relate to all adult learners.

Adult learners are self-directed and responsible for their own learning. Support them by encouraging active participation.

Adult learners bring their own knowledge and experience to learning. Encourage them to share their experience with others and learn from others.

Adult learners need learning to be relevant and practical, and they want to apply what they learn. Support them by having clear learning objectives with practical applications to their roles.
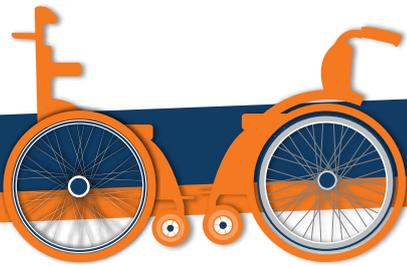
Activity 4: Problem solving

Problem solving is the process of finding the best solution to a challenge.

It is an important part of adult learning and an important skill in wheelchair service provision.

How can we help participants to problem solve and find their own solutions?

Help participants problem solve

- **Ask open ended questions –** Open-ended questions cannot be answered with a simple 'yes' or 'no'. They require participants to think more deeply about something, or explore their own experience and think for themselves, rather than guessing the answer you expect.
- **Ask rather than tell –** Ask participants what they think the solution should or could be, rather than telling them. Help them work it out for themselves.
- **Invite others in the group to come up with a response –** 'does anyone have a different idea?'
- **Encourage case discussion –** talk to participants about individual users who come to the training for assessment, fitting and user training.
- **Don't take 'I don't know' for an answer –** help participants consider what they do know about a subject and support them in considering possible answers.
- **Be patient –** developing problem-solving skills takes time.
- **One step at a time –** assist participants by breaking down the task into individual steps and asking questions/facilitating problem solving step-by-step.
- **Encourage** participants to be creative and to think laterally.
- **Encourage** participants to work together – teamwork and good communication helps to solve problems.

Remember

- When training participants to provide wheelchairs (WSTPb, WSTPi) there may be no simple answers.
- In the clinical context, some prescriptions, modifications or postural support devices may provide a good technical solution, but they may also create functional barriers or limitations.
- Acknowledge that often there is not one perfect solution. Wheelchair service provision requires compromise between what a client needs and the range of products available.