

Monitoring adult learners' performance

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<p><i>Monitoring</i></p> <p><i>Metacognition</i></p> <p><i>Feedback</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>What Monitoring is and what it is not</i> - <i>What metacognition is</i> - <i>The importance of metacognition</i> - <i>Metacognition in practice</i> - <i>What feedback is</i> - <i>The research behind feedback</i> - <i>The benefits of using feedback</i> - <i>How to receive feedback effectively</i> - <i>How to give feedback effectively</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Planning</i> - <i>Monitoring</i> - <i>Evaluation</i> - <i>Communication</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Self-awareness</i> - <i>Introspection</i> - <i>Mindfulness</i> - <i>Critical thinking</i> - <i>Problem-solving</i> - <i>Asking questions</i> - <i>Active listening</i> - <i>Empathy</i> - <i>Openness to criticism</i> - <i>Conflict management</i>

Introduction

When you have taught something, it is natural for you to know how much the students have learned, what level they are at, and what they need to improve. For that reason, we want to look at strategies that you can use to make sure your students are making progress.

This module will look at the role of feedback and concepts of self-monitoring in education. We will explore what it is, how it can be beneficial, its limits, and how to implement it.

Topic 1 | Understanding Adult Learning Monitoring



Definition of Monitoring in Adult Learning

The Oxford Learners Dictionary defines monitoring as "to watch and check something over a period of time in order to see how it develops so that you can make any necessary changes".

And to put into context, a typical definition for the classical teacher and student relation could be as follows:

Activities pursued by the educator to keep track of the students learning to make instructional decisions and provide feedback to students on their progress.

What is NOT Monitoring in Adult Learning

There is a distinct difference between monitoring learning progress between children and adults. While children require more extrinsic motivation and rely on instructor-led methods, adults are self-directed and rely heavily on their past life experiences when they approach learning opportunities. That is why monitoring adult learners' performance means empowering learners to successfully supervise their learning process.

That's why it is crucial to understand the difference between pedagogy and andragogy. Taking the less fitting approach could make a big difference between lacklustre learning and ready, engaged adults. This doesn't mean that children and adults always learn differently.

The fact is, adults come to the table with different motivators. They know what has worked in the past or have habits that affect how they learn and receive new information — because of this, approaching new topics with a traditional pedagogical strategy could leave them disengaged and not interested.

There are various strategies to monitor the success of knowledge acquisition. This text will focus on the role of metacognition and feedback, as their benefits have been widely demonstrated.



Topic 2 | Understanding Metacognition

Definition of Metacognition

Metacognition is one's ability to use prior knowledge to plan a strategy for approaching a learning task, take necessary steps to problem solve, reflect on and evaluate results, and modify one's approach as needed. It helps learners choose the right cognitive tool for the task and plays a critical role in successful learning.

Cognitive strategies are the basic mental abilities we use to think, study, and learn (e.g., recalling information from memory, analysing sounds and images, making associations between or comparing/ contrasting different pieces of information, and making inferences or interpreting text).

They help individuals achieve a particular goal, such as comprehending text or solving a maths problem, and they can be individually identified and measured.

In contrast, metacognitive strategies ensure that an overarching learning goal is being or has been reached.

Examples of metacognitive activities include planning how to approach a learning task, using appropriate skills and strategies to solve a problem, monitoring one's text comprehension, self-assessing and self-correcting in response to the self-assessment, evaluating progress toward the completion of a task, and becoming aware of distracting stimuli.



The Importance of Metacognition for Monitoring

Research shows that students can learn metacognitive skills to improve their learning. Metacognition is one's ability to use prior knowledge to plan a strategy for approaching a learning task, take necessary steps to problem solve, reflect on, monitor and evaluate results, and modify one's approach as needed. It helps learners choose the right cognitive tool for the task and plays a critical role in successful learning.

Constructing understanding requires both cognitive and metacognitive elements. Learners "construct knowledge" using mental strategies, and they regulate, monitor and evaluate their learning using metacognitive techniques. Through this "thinking about thinking," this use of metacognitive strategies, actual learning occurs.

As students become more skilled at using metacognitive strategies, they gain confidence and become more independent as learners. Individuals with well-developed metacognitive skills can think through a problem or approach a learning task, select appropriate strategies, and decide a course of action to resolve the issue or successfully perform the task. They often



think about their own thinking processes, taking time to think about and learn from mistakes or inaccuracies.

Some instructional programs that encourage students to learn metacognitive strategies enable them to engage in "metacognitive conversations" with themselves to "talk" about their learning, the challenges they encounter, and how they can self-correct and continue learning.

Moreover, individuals who demonstrate a wide variety of metacognitive skills perform better on exams and complete work more efficiently. They use the right tool for the job and modify learning strategies as needed, identifying blocks to learning and changing tools or methods to ensure goal attainment. Because metacognition plays a critical role in successful education, instructors must help learners develop metacognitively.

The Research Behind Metacognition

Metacognitive strategies can be taught and are associated with successful learning. Successful learners have a repertoire of strategies to select from and transfer them to new settings. Instructors need to set tasks at an appropriate level of difficulty. Students need to apply metacognitive strategies to monitor success but not so challenging that students become overwhelmed or frustrated.

Instructors need to prompt learners to think about what they are doing as they complete these tasks. Instructors should take care not to do the thinking for learners or tell them what to do because this runs the risk of making students experts at seeking help rather than experts at thinking about and directing their own learning. Instead, effective instructors continually prompt learners, asking, "What should you do next?"

It was found that few college instructors explicitly teach strategies for monitoring learning. They assume that students have already learned these strategies in high school. But many have not and are unaware of the metacognitive process and its importance to learning. Rote memorization is the usual — and often the only—learning strategy high school students employ when they enter college.

Learners need explicit instruction in both cognitive and metacognitive strategies. They need to know that they have choices about the methods they can employ in different contexts, and they need to monitor their use of and success with these strategies.

Monitoring and Metacognition Implementation

Instructors can encourage learners to become more strategic thinkers by helping them focus on the ways they process information.

Self-questioning, reflective journal writing, and discussing their thought processes with other learners are ways teachers can encourage learners to examine and develop their metacognitive strategies.



Metacognition is widely regarded as a process that spans three distinct phases and that, to be successful thinkers, students must do the following:

1. **Develop a plan** before approaching a learning task, such as reading for comprehension or solving a math problem.
2. **Monitor** their understanding; use "fix-up" strategies when meaning breaks down.
3. **Evaluate** their thinking after completing the task.

Instructors can model the application of questions and prompt learners to ask themselves questions during each phase. They can incorporate into lesson plans opportunities for learners to practice using these questions during learning tasks.

Here are some examples.

- **During the planning phase**, learners can ask, What am I supposed to learn? What prior knowledge will help me with this task? What should I do first? What should I look for in this reading? How much time do I have to complete this? In what direction do I want my thinking to take me?
- **During the monitoring phase**, learners can ask, How am I doing? Am I on the right track? How should I proceed? What information is important to remember? Should I move in a different direction? Should I adjust the pace because of the difficulty? What can I do if I do not understand?
- **During the evaluation phase**, learners can ask, How well did I do? What did I learn? Did I get the results I expected? What could I have done differently? Can I apply this way of thinking to other problems or situations? Is there anything I don't understand—any gaps in my knowledge? Do I need to go back through the task to fill in any gaps in understanding? How might I apply this line of thinking to other problems? Rather than viewing reading, writing, science, social studies, and maths only as subjects or content to be taught, instructors can see them as opportunities for learners to reflect on their learning processes.

Discipline Examples

Reading

Teach learners how to ask questions during reading and model "think-alouds." Ask learners questions during read-alouds and teach them to monitor their reading by constantly asking themselves if they understand what the text is about. Teach them to take notes or highlight important details, asking themselves, "Why is this a key phrase to highlight?" and "Why am I not highlighting this?"



Writing

Model prewriting strategies for organising thoughts, such as brainstorming ideas using a word with the main idea at the top and the supporting details below it.

The goal of teaching metacognitive strategies is to help learners become comfortable with these strategies. They employ them automatically to learn tasks, focus their attention, derive meaning, and adjust if something goes wrong. They do not think about these skills while performing them, but they can usually accurately describe their metacognitive processes if asked what they are doing.

Topic 3 | Feedback



Feedback is often perceived as a chore at the end of an event.

Teachers receive final feedback on their training, learners on what they have learned.

But feedback can do much more.

It offers an excellent opportunity to improve the quality of continuing education, individual learning success, and the learners' motivation.

But what is feedback? What forms and requirements are there, and how can they be used meaningfully in adult education?

Definition of Feedback

The Oxford Learners Dictionary defines monitoring as "advice, criticism or information about how good or useful something or somebody's work is". This communicated perception or assessment can be used in a further step for change or improvement. In further education, feedback describes the communication between people in which one gives the other information about what they have perceived or understood. This enables the receiver to respond to the feedback by correcting their behaviour or thinking.

There are two types of feedback, formative and summative. Whereas summative feedback is a final, summarising feedback on the sum of the acquired knowledge and skills, formative feedback explores the learning status and the approach to learning goals at a certain point in time. It shows any gaps in knowledge, types of errors and lack of or wrong understanding.



Formative feedback strongly influences individual learning and is an essential prerequisite for further course planning.

The Australian professors Boud and Molloy define formative feedback as follows:

"Feedback is a process whereby learners receive information about their work. This allows them to self-assess the similarities and differences to the appropriate standards as well as the value of their work, thereby improving their work."

In adult education, teachers are the ones who give formative feedback, but they can also receive feedback, for example, from learners.

The Research Behind Feedback

Feedback has long been recognized as a powerful means for promoting learning and growth in students. Recent research supports the notion that providing students with meaningful feedback can significantly enhance their knowledge and achievement.

Not all forms of feedback are considered to be equally effective, and some feedback can even be counterproductive — primarily if it is delivered in a solely negative or corrective way.

Several studies within the past decade have explored strategies for giving feedback in educational settings, resulting in a variety of research-backed tips for effective feedback to increase students' motivation, performance, and self-esteem.

The more personalised feedback is, the better it will be received. Specific, student-centred feedback should be: delivered to learners individually, about their performance and presented in a motivation-building way.

Our ability to provide meaningful, accurate feedback erodes as time elapses. Numerous studies indicate that feedback is most effective when delivered immediately versus a few days, weeks, or months down the line.

A review of 131 studies on feedback found that over a third of feedback interventions decreased student performance. Well-intentioned educators might regularly provide comments to students that reduce their intrinsic motivation and discourage them from learning.

Involving learners in the feedback process helps them develop self-awareness while equipping them with the decision-making skills to better recognize mistakes and identify weak points to address.

The Benefits of Feedback

A central task of feedback is to point out mistakes, misconceptions and gaps in knowledge and to give hints on possibly necessary further knowledge acquisition or further knowledge change. Especially in adult education, feedback offers an excellent opportunity to improve the quality of the lessons, individual learning success, and learners' motivation.



Learners come to the training with different expectations and have a more or less clear goal of what they want to have achieved or learned at the end. Knowing these different learning goals is essential to meet the different expectations and create a learning-promoting and motivating climate.

Regular, individual feedback enables the participants to better perceive their progress and work self-directed on their goals and sub-goals. In this way, the teacher can better adapt his further training, the contents and methods to the prerequisites and expectations of the participants.

Feedback can fulfil very different objectives in a training course:

- It helps teachers and learners reduce the discrepancy between self-assessment and external assessment and develop personally.
- Feedback promotes exchange between teachers and learners about learning.
- It supports teachers to improve their teaching style.
- It helps in assessing where the learner is in relation to their learning goal, and which sub-goals have already been achieved. Feedback thus helps to make (learning) successes visible.
- Feedback promotes the learning process of the learners. It becomes clear which (learning) paths are successful and which are less suitable, and new solutions and strategies can be developed.
- Feedback motivates learning and encourages students to find new ways of learning and to engage with their own learning.

How to Receive Feedback Effectively

Listen to the feedback given

This means not interrupting. Hear the person out, and listen to what they are saying, not what you assume they will say. You can absorb more information if you concentrate on listening and understanding rather than being defensive and focusing on your response.

Be aware of your responses

Your body language and tone of voice often speak louder than words. Try to avoid putting up barriers. If you look distracted and bored, that sends a negative message as well. Attentiveness, on the other hand, indicates that you value what someone has to say and puts both of you at ease.

Be open

This means being receptive to new ideas and different opinions. Often, there is more than one way of doing something, and others may have a completely different viewpoint on a given topic. You may learn something worthwhile.

Understand the message

Make sure you understand what is being said to you, especially before responding to the feedback. Ask questions for clarification if necessary. Listen actively by repeating critical points so that you know you have interpreted the input correctly. In a group environment, ask for others' feedback before responding. When possible, be explicit as to what kind of feedback you are seeking beforehand, so you are not taken by surprise.

Reflect and decide what to do

Assess the value of the feedback, the consequences of using it or ignoring it, and then decide what to do because of it. Your response is your choice. If you disagree with the feedback, consider asking for a second opinion from someone else.

Follow up

There are many ways to follow up on feedback. Sometimes, your follow-up will simply involve implementing the suggestions given to you. In other situations, you might want to set up another meeting to discuss the feedback or re-submit the revised work.

How to Give Feedback Effectively

Concentrate on the behaviour, not the person

One strategy is to open by stating the behaviour in question, then describing how you feel about it, and ending with what you want. This model enables you to avoid sounding accusatory by using "I" and focusing on behaviours instead of assumed interpretations.

Example: "I haven't seen you in class for a week. I'm worried that you are missing important information. Can we meet soon to discuss it?", instead of: "You obviously don't care about this course!"

Balance the content

Use the "sandwich approach." Begin by providing comments on specific strengths. This provides reinforcement and identifies the things the recipient should keep doing. Then identify particular areas of improvement and ways to make changes. Conclude with a positive comment.



This model helps to bolster confidence and keep the weak areas in perspective. Example: "Your presentation was great. You made good eye contact and were well prepared. You were a little hard to hear at the back of the room, but you can overcome this with some practice. Keep up the good work!" Instead of: "You didn't speak loudly enough. However, the presentation went well."

Be specific

Avoid general comments that may be of limited use to the receiver. Try to include examples to illustrate your statement. Offering alternatives rather than just giving advice allows the receiver to decide what to do with your feedback.

Be realistic

Feedback should focus on what can be changed. It is useless and frustrating for recipients to get comments on something they have no control over. Also, remember to avoid using the words "always" and "never." People's behaviour is rarely that consistent.

Own the feedback

When offering evaluative comments, use the pronoun "I" rather than "they" or "one," which would imply that your opinion is universally agreed on. Remember that feedback is merely your opinion.

Be timely

Seek an appropriate time to communicate your feedback. Being prompt is key since feedback loses its impact if delayed too long. Delayed feedback can also cause feelings of guilt and resentment in the recipient if the opportunity for improvement has passed. If your feedback is primarily negative, take time to prepare what you will say or write.

Offer continuing support

Feedback should be a continuous process, not a one-time event. After offering feedback, make a conscious effort to follow up. Let recipients know you are available if they have questions and, if appropriate, ask for another opportunity to provide more feedback in the future.



Test and Evaluation

1. There is no difference between monitoring children and adults learning progress.
 - True
 - False

2. The educator knows best which learning strategy works for whom.
 - True
 - False

3. Always use the pronoun “they” when giving feedback.
 - True
 - False

4. It doesn't matter when you give feedback; it can be right after a lesson, a week later or a month later. It is always considered effective feedback.
 - True
 - False

5. Effective Feedback motivates learning and encourages students.
 - True
 - False



6. The more personalised feedback is, the better it will be received.
 - True
 - False

7. The research found out that most of the learners already know and use self-monitoring strategies.
 - True
 - False

8. Self-Assessment plays a vital role in adult education.
 - True
 - False

9. Individuals who demonstrate a wide variety of metacognitive skills perform better on exams and complete work more efficiently.
 - True
 - False

10. When receiving feedback: Make sure you understand what is being said, especially before responding to the feedback.
 - True
 - False



SELF-ASSESSMENT QUESTIONNAIRE

1. What are some practises similar to self-monitoring you have previously followed?

2. Which of the mentioned strategies to receive feedback effectively appeals to you the most?

3. Which of the mentioned strategies to give feedback effectively appeals to you the most?

4. After getting familiar with the theory and the accompanying activities:
 - In which scenario do you see yourself implementing one of the activities in one of your classes?

 - What effect could it have on your class?

5. What are some elements of self-monitoring that you can see yourself adopting and using?



Correct answers to the quiz:

- 1) F
- 2) F
- 3) F
- 4) F
- 5) T
- 6) T
- 7) F
- 8) T
- 9) T
- 10) T



Sources and additional materials

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TEAL Center Fact Sheet No. 4: Metacognitive Processes 2010, Teaching Excellence in Adult Literacy, accessed 16 December 2021, <https://lincs.ed.gov/sites/default/files/4_TEAL_Metacognitive.pdf>

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Darn, S (n.d.), Monitoring, British Council, accessed 16 December 2021, <<https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/article/monitoring>>

Self, J 2020, Monitoring Learning for Continuous Improvement p. 87-100, National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, *Teaching K–12 Science and Engineering During a Crisis*, Washington, DC: The National Academies Press, accessed 16 December 2021 <<https://doi.org/10.17226/25909>>

Examples for metacognitive strategies and practical tips for implementation:
<https://uwaterloo.ca/centre-for-teaching-excellence/teaching-resources/teaching-tips/metacognitive>

An insightful short video explaining what metacognition is about:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eIZFL4FLVLE>

More exercises to practice giving meaningful feedback:
<https://www.viamaven.com/blog/try-these-feedback-exercises-with-your-team>