

## Module: 4 Instructional Strategies for Deaf and Deaf-Blind Adult Learners

### Adult Learning Environment:

- **Appropriate classroom for adults** – Adult learners need an adult environment. That includes furniture that is the right size and style for them. If possible, set up the classroom in a way they would expect to find in the workplace. For example, in a boardroom style or U-shaped setting so learners can see each other. Make sure there is good lighting for every workspace. Any decorations, posters, pictures should all be adult-appropriate.
  - Some adult learners may feel nervous about coming “back to school.” You could use plants, magazines, and inspiring pictures or posters to make the space more friendly and inviting.
- **Physically accessible to all learners** –Learners may have a variety of physical needs. Some may use a wheelchair or have back and neck problems. Be prepared to make your workspace physically accessible as needed.

### Learning Environment for Deaf Learners:

- Classes will need to be held in a well lit environment with the practitioner’s face lit from the front. Do not teach with a window or strong light behind you. The learners will not be able to see your face well and it can cause their eyes to become tired.
- Literacy practitioners need to communicate effectively in both ASL and English and have a good understanding of Deaf culture and diversity.

- Use demonstrations and examples when teaching. They usually work better than telling or explaining.
- Use visual activities: pictures or photos, overheads, flipcharts, whiteboards, computers and so on.
- Deaf people rely on their eyes for communication and for learning new information. Watch for signs of eye fatigue or visual problems (blinking, rubbing eyes, squinting, or headache).

### **Learning Environment for Deaf-Blind Learners:**

- Work in a well lit environment, without glare on materials and computer screens.
- Avoid “visual” noise, such as bright posters or clothes, and moving objects such as fans or curtains. Also avoid auditory background noise.
- Literacy practitioners need to communicate effectively in ASL and English as well as other communication methods used by the Deaf-Blind learners, including: printed, brailled, fingerspelled hand-over-hand and so on. Practitioners need to have a strong understanding of the diverse and unique needs of Deaf-Blind learners.
- Use comfortable seating with extra space to adjust for various communication methods.
- Make sure other areas used by the Deaf-Blind learner are well lit and uncluttered (washrooms, stairs, halls).
- Avoid glare, shadows or direct light on the learner’s eyes. Do not teach with a window or strong light behind you.

# Valuing Diversity

## Deaf and Deaf-Blind Learners:

### Background

Deaf and Deaf-Blind learners come from diverse backgrounds. Some learners may have had negative or hurtful experiences at school; self-esteem may have been damaged. You may also find that some learners have been promoted through the grades without actually passing. You are likely to find gaps in life experiences and language skills. Other learners may have been mainstreamed into hearing schools. This too may have had a negative impact on the learner due to social isolation and limited accessibility.

**Note:** Whatever the learner's background, it is important for the practitioner to **create a positive learning environment**. Make special efforts in the first few weeks to help the learner get used to the adult learning environment. Take time, if needed, to discuss how the literacy program is not like the schools they attended in the past. Help them set reachable goals so they experience success.

Hearing people take in so much information just by listening to the TV or the radio. They can overhear conversations, go to the movies, and easily share information over the phone. This "incidental learning" just happens as the brain continually processes information it hears.

Deaf and Deaf-Blind people, especially those in literacy programs, often have large gaps in their world knowledge and learning experience. They share information and skills with each other using American Sign Language or tactile communication. But world information is still limited because it is not always made accessible to the Deaf and Deaf-Blind.

## Learning Styles

Our Learning Style is the way we learn and process new information. There are three main learning styles in the Deaf and Deaf-Blind literacy field:

- visual picture learning (learning by seeing – pictures, graphs, diagrams)
- visual language learning (learning by having someone explain to them)
- kinesthetic or tactile learning (learning by doing, or touching)

Most people use 2 or 3 of these styles to some degree, but tend to use one style more than the others. This is their **preferred learning style**.

### Visual Picture Learners

**VPL = Visual Picture Learner** (let me see, show me pictures)

People who are visual picture learners learn best by seeing information. They tend to think in pictures and create clear images in their mind to remember information. These are some characteristics of many individuals with strong visual skills:

1. Visual picture learners remember information best if it is presented with visual aids – pictures, charts, videos.
2. Visual picture learners can make “movies in their minds” of information they are reading. Their movies are often clear and detailed.
3. Visual picture learners watch the body language of other people to help them understand (facial expressions, eyes, body language, etc.)

### Visual Language Learners

**VLL = Visual Language Learner** (explain it to me in ASL)

Visual language learners learn best by having someone explain information. They can usually remember information best when it is explained to them in ASL (or their preferred language). They like to know all the facts. Here are

some characteristics of individuals with strong visual language processing skills:

1. Visual language learners are very good at remembering details of information they are told in ASL during conversations or lectures.
2. Visual language learners have strong language skills in ASL and usually have strong expressive communication skills. They have interesting conversations and can express their ideas clearly.
3. Visual language learners are able to read meaning from body language, facial grammar and ASL sign intensity.

## **Tactile or Kinesthetic learners**

**KL = Kinesthetic Learner** (show me, then let me do it)

Tactile or Kinesthetic learners learn best by doing, moving their bodies, and using their muscles while they learn. They are the "hands-on learners" or the "doers." They focus better and learn more when movement is involved. Here are some characteristics of tactile or kinesthetic learners.

1. Tactile or kinesthetic learners often wiggle or rock back and forth, tap their feet, or "bounce" their legs when they sit.
2. Tactile or kinesthetic learners work well with their hands. They may be good at repair work, sculpting, art, or working with tools.
3. Tactile or kinesthetic learners may find it hard to sit still for too long. They may become distracted and feel the need to move around.

## **Preferred Learning Styles (sample lesson)**

We know people learn in different ways. Most people have one preferred way for how they process new information, the style that works best for them.

Here is a sample lesson showing how you can include all three learning styles when you teach:

## Getting Ready to Work (sample lesson)

The practitioner begins by signing a story (**VLL**) about a worker who poured a strong chemical on part of an engine to remove grease. The worker got burned very badly because the chemical was too strong. The instructions said the chemical should have mixed with water first to dilute it.

The practitioner acts out the story about what happened to the worker (**KL**). She also uses ASL with lots of facial expression (**VPL**), sign intensity (**VLL**) and eye contact with the learners (**VPL** and **KL**).

She stops suddenly (**KL**) and asks a few quick questions (**VLL**). She moves to a new place in the room with each question (**KL** and **VPL**) and makes eye contact with each learner as they answer.

1. Why do you think this worker got burned?
2. What did the worker do wrong?
3. Why do you think the person didn't read the instructions?

The instructor "listens" to the ideas from the class, e.g.

### 3. Why do you think the person didn't read the instructions?

- He didn't know there were any instructions.
- He couldn't read them.
- He didn't bother to check.
- He didn't know they were important.
- He didn't realize what the instructions were for.
- He couldn't understand the instructions.

After each answer, the practitioner writes a few key words from the learner's ideas on the whiteboard (**VPL**) and repeats them in ASL (**VLL**). Because information gets repeated in this way, the practitioner can keep the pace moving quickly. (**KL**)

## **A Few Words about Learning Disabilities**

It is estimated that up to 60% of learners in LBS classes may have a learning disability. A person with a learning disability doesn't get over it; he doesn't get better; there is no cure.

A learning disability affects more than learning to read, write, and do math. It affects that person's life from the minute he wakes up in the morning until he goes to bed at night. It affects everything related to receiving and processing information.

For these learners, identifying and working with their preferred learning style is not just helpful – it is necessary. Practitioners will need to identify their learning styles and develop training resources to match the learner's needs.

**Find more information about Learning Disabilities in Module 2.**

## **Teaching Methods:**

A literacy practitioner's job can be a challenge. There are very few resources available for teaching adult Deaf and Deaf-Blind learners. It is generally up to the practitioner to select, adapt or create learning materials. With learners at a variety of levels and learning styles, this is not an easy task. That is why it is so important to develop a good working relationship with the learner.

The learner often has the best knowledge and understanding of their abilities and needs. Be sure to match their preferred communication style and provide adaptive technologies when it is needed. Get to know their strengths and learning styles. Teach to those strengths so they experience success and see progress. Try to connect new information with something the learner already knows.

The curriculum you use should always be related to the learner's goals. Take the time to explain how each learning activity will help the learner achieve their goals. Keep lesson plans interesting but not too challenging. Some learners may need extra time to process new information. Be available to give additional help if it is needed.

There are many things to consider when preparing activities: individual goals, culture, learning styles, methods of communication, past experiences, economic background, personal characteristics, learning disabilities, and so on. Meeting each learner's expectations may seem an impossible task. But it is important to keep a positive attitude – focus on what the learner can do and build from there. Make their time in your literacy program a positive and productive experience.

**Teaching Tips:**

- keep class sizes small
- encourage group work
- use a variety of teaching styles and learning activities
- breakaway from regular class work sometimes
- use humour (without sarcasm or insults)
- encourage independence and self direction
- accept that learners (and practitioners) will have “off days” sometimes