

## **Five Strategies to Enhance the Transfer of Learning from Classroom to Clinical Setting**

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### **Abstract**

In pursuit of enhancing the transfer of learning from the classroom to a clinical setting, we revisit five proven strategies in education. These strategies are not at all novel, but when viewed through a different elevated lens, the perspective is reborn and very enticing to the adult learner. With a multisensory spin, new life breathes into these tried and true, yet tired, teaching techniques. The strategies appeal to all learning styles and are modifiable to fit any educational setting and subject matter. We are going to direct our teaching techniques towards Generation Y, aka “The Millennials.” The new information conveyed will be a “game changer” when it comes to teaching these contemporary, technology-reliant learners. Even the most seasoned instructor will find it easy to adapt these new methods into lesson plans.

Keywords: Transfer of Learning, Healthcare, Multisensory

### **The Millennials**

Who are these so-called “Millennials” anyway? A Millennial is anyone born between 1981 and 1999. Yet, there is so much more than meets the eye when it comes to Millennials. According to the Huffington Post, “After years of being told that they’re lazy, entitled narcissists, the most high-maintenance workforce in the history of the world and just generally unlikeable ... they seem to have internalized the message” (Edwards-Levy, 2015). While baby boomers and members of the “Silent Generation” describe themselves as patriotic, responsible, hardworking and self-reliant, the only thing most millennial-aged adults describe themselves as is “self-absorbed.” But are they really that bad, or just misunderstood? Didn’t every generation before, claim that the newer generation was going to be “the end of us all”? While there are many negative attributes attached to this generation—like their desire for information on-demand, less self-reliant and “connected fluidly to devices” (McGee, 2016)—there are many positive characteristics associated with this generation too. For example, Millennials are open to change, team orientated and generally, enthusiastically optimistic. So, don’t judge a book by its cover. As their educator, you can be the impetus for a revolution among the Millennial generation.

### **The Starting Line**

When developing a program or curriculum, it is important to plan for the transfer of learning in an organized manner. Within education, there are sponsoring organizations and participants requesting outcomes that are applicable and practical, that make a difference (Caffarella & Daffron, 2013). Therefore, in order to create a fruitful instructional design, one must successfully transition through the “before, during and after goals.” When we effectively progress through these goals we know if the design has been binding. The recommendation is to use transfer strategies before the program begins, because strategies employed after the program ends, are usually the most difficult for planners to influence (Daffron & North, 2011).

“Before goals” clear a pathway for learning, uncovering “many issues and concerns related to the lives of adult learners” (Caffarella & Daffron, 2013). This is the time to remove obstacles and address the problems and anxieties of our adult learners. The “during” goals “support the student

in their education and meet them at their level of learning” (Response to Intervention, 2016). It is important to establish “during goals” that are realistic to the audience you are teaching. In this phase, we help the student by scaffolding the learning. Lastly, “after” goals aim to solidify the transfer of learning. It is here we ascertain that a comprehensive transfer of learning has occurred. The “after goals” include consideration of the students’ future, by setting up opportunities for continuing education, in order to enhance what they have learned. Transition through the goals is not bound by time. In fact, it is better to be flexible throughout because it offers the opportunity for fluidity and adaptability. This transfer is not rooted in a specific time phase, and it’s not cookie-cutter. In education, we work with humans ... humans who are all extremely different. The goals should adapt to the needs of the students. The transfer is stronger if the events are not separate, but rather interconnected.

### ***#1 Personalized and Collaborative Learning Environment***

The first method to strengthen the transfer of learning is to create a personalized and collaborative learning environment. “The primary responsibility of an educator is to assure that no [student] ever feels like they are not worthy contributors in their classroom” (Nosal, 2012). Each student should feel a sense of belonging within the classroom. Learning is not only the absorption of information by a student, but a combination of many factors. A student thrives on a sense of mutual trust within a safe learning environment that lacks bias and has cultural sensitivity. This type of atmosphere draws the student out and allows them to feel like a valuable contributor. Fostering a positive setting in the classroom produces a sense of security. The atmosphere should be encouraging as it pertains to taking safe challenges without fear of ridicule. A supportive environment is the building block to developing a student with positive self-efficacy, who will engage within the classroom. If a student fears shame and ridicule from peers and educators, they will protect themselves and avoid taking risks for fear of embarrassment.

Achieving this type of environment is simple with the integration of some small changes within the classroom. Start by rearranging the class in a circle and hold interactive discussions, rather than just having the instructor lead a lecture. A collaborative culture encourages active learning from others. In a healthcare learning environment, the students absorb a lot from other people’s experiences. By applying this strategy, the students will begin teaching each other the material, while the instructor becomes more of a facilitator (as opposed to a traditional teacher). Open dialog allows the class to hear all personal experiences and draw from them. Making these modifications eliminates the old way of teaching (with the lecturer regurgitating the material to a classroom of bored zombies looking at the back of each other’s heads). With a personalized, collaborative learning environment, the student can see their peers’ faces, witness their emotions, and humanize the learning experience. It leads a student to be accountable and gives them autonomy.

### ***#2 Light a Fire, Create a Desire***

As educators, it is our wish that students would be thirsting for knowledge and be on the edge of their seats with every word we utter. But that is not the case. How do we establish that longing, that craving, to learn in our students? How do we form that connection to why they should want to learn? It happens when you give a student a reason. Everything the educator says and does, becomes the lens through which their students experience the content. So, would you say that you’re passionate about what you teach or should I say ... are you passionate *when* you teach?

Great educators create anticipation and invite reflection that deepens the students' learning experience.

In the classroom, when assigning reading for homework, have the students use an anticipation guide. "The Anticipation Guides strategy asks students to express their opinions about ideas before they encounter them in a text or unit of study. Completing anticipation guides helps students recognize and connect to themes that surface in their learning" (Staff, 2017). If an educator is passionate, they create that desire by lighting the fire within their students. A teacher may not be super eloquent or even be a total expert on the subject matter, but if they are passionate and have a love for the subject, that passion will transmit to the students.

### **WIIFM**

Every generation of teaching is different because we're teaching to an ever-changing population ... right? In higher education right now, we are primarily teaching Millennials. Before this generation engages in anything, they first want to know "what's in it for me" (WIIFM)? This question drives almost every decision they make, from the moment they wake up and intuitively check their devices, to when they finally switch off at bedtime.

So, with all the competing priorities of modern life, it's imperative our teaching answers the student's #1 question long before it even crosses their minds. We need to make the answer glaringly obvious! It's time to make educational benefits irresistible! "They need to experience change in delivery formats to maintain interest. Their attention spans are shorter – they quickly move on to other forms of learning. Their ideal learning environment involves less lecture and more collaboration with peers. Group-based projects that emulate the work environment (authentic assessments) are ideal for these learners" (Laskaris, 2016).

Whatever the student's ideal answer is to WIIFM, we need to remember that it might not always be what they are going to *get* out of doing something, but perhaps how they are going to *feel* by doing something. As humans, it is natural that what draws us in is also what makes us feel good and automatically gets our reward receptors buzzing. The answer to WIIFM is to teach *for* the student, not *to* the student. Meaning, the student needs to instantaneously feel the benefit of the information you are teaching.

To entice this generation, one must always keep in mind that "Millennials prefer a broad spectrum of learning strategies. The concept of learner-style is more pronounced in this generation. They prefer learning materials, that when delivered, it caters to their visual, auditory and even kinesthetic needs" (Laskaris, 2016). Therefore, at the beginning of the class, either via discussion or a written assignment, ask your students ... what drives them. Also ask yourself what can you do to help "light their fire"? This gives you an immediate inside-look into your students' thought process. Then you have a better chance at isolating the key to what drives them.

### ***#3 Repetition by Stimulating the Senses***

Research has confirmed that for information to move from short-term memory into long-term memory, a person must be exposed to the information approximately 7-10 times. For one piece

of material, that exposure seems easy to accomplish. But when you're learning an entire chapter, book, vocation or degree program, that information multiplies exponentially.

Here's how it works. When information comes in, it is routed through either the quick road—the amygdala—or the slow road—the hippocampus-cortex. Once information comes in, it needs encoding. In other words, a translation must occur so the brain understands where to put the information for storage and remembering. When students learn through stimulating the senses, information (that memory) is sent down the slow road to the long-term memory, the main memory storage center. This is our goal as educators. Applying methods of teaching that are multisensory enhances the learning experience and increases the likelihood of transference from the short-term to the long-term memory.

We stimulate the senses through multisensory learning, by appealing to the students' different learning styles (visual, auditory, tactile/kinesthetic). So, when creating the curriculum, look for varying methods to deliver the information, rather than just reading, lecturing, and answering questions. Look to integrate videos or pictures that explain the material. This will introduce visual and auditory stimuli. When teaching a lesson, see if you can include an experiment or a hands-on demonstration. This will help deliver the concept on a deeper level. By teaching the material in a multitude of ways, students witness "spaced repetition." The information they learn is chunked-out and delivered in intervals (i.e. the 7-10 times). When the student experiences the material in varying intervals the concept then gains a deeper level of reinforcement.

Multisensory learning environments enhance brain function. Each sensory system has targets in the brain that stimulate cognitive function. Because of this, when students hear information that connects to another sense, they can conceptualize and later apply that information better than the students who just watched and listened. It is through these multisensory teaching techniques that each sensory system becomes even more developed and higher functioning. This improves essential brain functions, such as listening skills, movement, vision, tactile recognition and conceptualization.

It's very easy for a student to zone out. In higher education, especially, students have multiple responsibilities outside of school; therefore, it's difficult to pay attention to every piece of information. Especially when it comes to them the same way, class after class, day after day. Students are attentive when educators use multisensory teaching techniques, because in one time frame the brain uses many senses. If a student is doing something tactically or physically, while listening to instructions and seeing information, there's not an opportunity for the student's attention to stray. Teaching in a way that forces several senses to work together, not only allows students to make stronger connections to the information, but it demands more focus in an enjoyable way. It's like candy for the brain.

#### ***#4 Teach-Back***

In healthcare, we use a "teach back" method between clinician and patient. But educators have found that the use of this method is effective in the classroom setting as well. This strategy is a valuable component helping adult learners process information into long term memory. The teach-back process used in a kinesthetic, auditory or visual format—or a combination of all three—promotes enhanced learning. The process begins when the instructor asks "Show me how you would do ABC ... Walk me through the steps of the ABC procedure," and then the student

demonstrates or verbally repeats while demonstrating the task. The teach-back method is a communication confirmation method used by healthcare providers to confirm whether a patient (or caretaker) understands the explanation or instructions given to them. If a patient understands, they can “teach back” the information accurately. One of the most promising and successful evidence-based techniques for delivering patient education is the teach-back method. Patient understanding is verified if they can restate the information in their own words. Teach-back is a proven way to confirm that the health care professional has explained the necessary information in a manner that the patients can understand.

### ***#5 Reflection***

“Most of us go through life viewing our experiences as isolated, unrelated events. We also view these happenings simply as the experiences they are, not as opportunities for learning” (Costa & Kallick, 2008). Reflection involves linking a current experience to something previous learned. Reflection also involves drawing forth cognitive and emotional information from several sources: visual, auditory, kinesthetic, and tactile. To reflect, we must act upon and process the information, by producing and assessing the data. In the end, reflecting also means applying what we've learned to frameworks beyond the original circumstances in which we learned something.

To be reflective means to mentally stroll through where we have been and to try to make some sense out of it. Most classrooms align themselves more with the present and the future and not really with the past. In this kind of setting, the students (and educators) find it easier to abandon what has happened and to move forward, without taking stock and applying consideration to the experiences they have just gone through. What current application is proving now is that by actively engaging in remembering and connecting experiences to information learned, the student gains a deeper level of the material. This thoughtfulness penetrates their surroundings into their inner self. Then the student can see themselves in the setting and the experiences transfer to visual recalls and memories.

These days there are many fun, relevant, options for reflective learning—options that will even appeal to Millennials. For one, there are options for voice and video recordings. The students can create an audio and visual testimonial (reflection) of their experiences. They can keep an electronic blog that's stored on cloud sites such as google docs, Dropbox, Wordpress, PebblePad or other easily accessible apps.

The students enjoy creating mind maps. A mind map is an electronic brainstorm, where the students make connections between different aspects. This holds a benefit over paper-based ones, because they are straightforward and attach other resources, such as examples of work, multimedia files or even other mind maps. These types of tools have built-in ways to promote and support structured reflection that enhance the benefit of the process and encourage deeper learning.

The main objective in education is to equip students for life. In the information age, our knowledge-sharing world drives the power of connectivity. It changes the very essence of learning, as education and technology go hand in hand. It creates new opportunities for students to collaborate, network and spread ideas. The blueprint for education during the industrial era felt

a “one-size-fits-all” approach was best. This was where the students’ requirement was to listen and not question, and to memorize and repeat in preparation for a totally different working environment than the one we have today. As times have changed, so has the way we teach. Our focus is to nurture an in-depth understanding and a passion for transformation. It is my desire that current educators seek to evolve and maximize their own learning opportunities, so students can develop the skills needed to navigate a rapidly evolving world.

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