

MH3400: LESSON SUMMARY AND REQUIRED ASSIGNMENTHOW We Teach: Error-Free Learning - Part 2

Quick Review of Material Covered in Error-Free Learning - Part 1: We teach clients ADLs, Adaptive Behavior/Social Rules, and Communication so that they can meet the 3I-P's, i.e., so they can have the most independent and productive lives possible while also being included with everyone else and having the opportunity to meet their individual needs, preferences and goals. In order to achieve the best results possible when teaching ADLs, Adaptive Behavior and Communication, we use a process called Error-Free Learning. In Part 1 of Error-Free Learning, we covered two important principles of Error-Free Learning: 1) Partializing a task BEFORE teaching it, and 2) Introducing the learning activity. Partializing a task means to break it down into its component parts. For example, if you are teaching a client to make a peanut butter and jelly sandwich, there are multiple steps that need to be taken such as get the bread, open the bread and take two slices, get the peanut butter, etc. Partializing an ADL task means that you break the task down into pieces BEFORE you teach your client so that you teach the task in exactly the same order each time you work with the client. The purpose of this is to make the learning process easier for the client. If you change the order of the steps around, it may be confusing to the client and thus make it harder for the client to learn the task.

Introducing a learning activity: In general, you want to introduce a learning activity quickly and with energy and enthusiasm. In most cases, you should NOT ask the client whether or not they want to do the activity. This is because if the client says "no, I don't want to do that" you are left with two bad options: EITHER "Well, you're going to do it!" OR "OK, so I guess you just won't learn this skill." Instead, introduce the activity quickly and get the client involved in learning right away. This strategy almost always works. In the rare case where a client strenuously objects to participating, of course you do not force them.

Four More Principles of Error-Free Learning:

1) Teach ADLs, Adaptive Behavior and Communication by teaching in the REAL situation

Whenever possible, conduct the learning activity in the REAL situation where the client will actually use the skill being taught. In the past, helping professionals did things like teaching clients with disabilities how to use money by using PLAY money rather than taking the client to a store, and helping them learn to purchase something using REAL money. Clients were also taught to use the telephone by using a TOY telephone rather than a real one and so on, and were taught about stop signs, traffic lights and crosswalks by being shown pictures of these items in a classroom.

Practicing in the REAL situation makes learning easier and more impactful! When this is not done, the client must GENERALIZE the learning, i.e., apply what has been learned in a fake situation to the real situation. This is MUCH HARDER to do than if the skill had been learned in the situation where it will be used.

EXAMPLE: This class! Because of the structure of higher education and due to the fact we are now working on-line because of COVID-19, students are expected to learn skills to work with clients while being completely separated from REAL clients! Now, just imagine that instead this class was being taught in a day program for people with developmental disabilities. Students in this class would be taught the same principles of teaching ADLs, Adaptive Behavior and Communication but would have the chance to practice using the teaching skills they are learning by working with and teaching actual clients. Wouldn't that greatly help you learn the skills? Otherwise, you are expected to learn them in this class and later on, all by yourself, apply them in a real situation with an actual client. Bottom line: Always teach a client a new skill by practicing in the real environment where the client will use the skill being taught, or in an environment that as close to real as possible.

2) Multi-sensory learning works BEST!

Multi-sensory learning is learning in a way that engages MORE than one of your five senses (hearing, vision, touching, smelling, tasting). We all learn BEST when more than one of our five senses is engaged. This is why teachers TELL you things (hearing) AND write the same information on the board (seeing)! When you also WRITE (touching/kinesthetic sense) down what the teacher says, you have now increased your chances of learning the information EVEN IF YOU NEVER LOOK AT THE NOTES YOU TOOK AGAIN! This is because you have now used THREE of your five senses (hearing, vision, touch). By the way, this is an excellent reason to take notes in class, even if you don't plan to review your notes. Taking notes won't make you learn perfectly, but it will make you learn more than you would have if you did not take notes.

Multi-sensory learning is hands on learning... in other words, getting the client actively involved in the learning process. If you do this, your client will learn MORE both because of the impact of multisensory learning and also because hands on learning motivates and gets clients more interested. ASK YOURSELF:

Which works best for you... when a teacher or professor lectures for the entire class period or when the teacher leads an active class discussion or uses a learning activity that gets students involved? Bottom line: do NOT want to lecture your clients. Instead, get them involved in the learning process right away using a hands on, multi-sensory approach!

3) When teaching, be as CONCRETE as possible!

An abstraction is anything that is NOT the real thing. As you read this, you will come to understand why abstractions make learning harder for ALL of us! Our goal when teaching is to be concrete!

To understand what it meant by being concrete versus being abstract, let's start off with an example: Imagine the COVID-19 is over and you come to my class one day. You sit down, open up your notebook and are ready to learn. I say, "OK, class, I'm going to teach you about Chaos Theory and you will need to know this for the final exam. Here's the definition: according to Chaos Theory, social processes are initially random. Eventually order emerges as attractor patterns develop." This is an example of a VERY abstract statement! Did you understand it? Is it boring? Is it a little overwhelming? Are you motivated to find out more about Chaos Theory? (probably not!). The point is, this statement is so abstract that it: 1) probably turns off many students, and 2) there is a fairly slim chance students will understand what it means.

Now watch what happens when I give you an EXAMPLE illustrating what Chaos Theory is. An example will make my statement about Chaos Theory much more CONCRETE!

Here goes: A long time ago, I was working in Manhattan. My boss sent me uptown to pick up a package. I took the train, went to the address he had given me, picked up the package and went to the station to get on the train to go back to work. I was by myself and didn't know anyone in the station or on the train. When the train pulled in, I randomly entered one of the open doors to the train as did all the other people who happened to be in the station at that time. The train pulled out of the station and we all pretty much ignored other passengers as New Yorkers do. All of a sudden there was an ear splitting noise, the train jerked suddenly to a stop, and the lights went out. The combination of the noise, the sudden stop and the lights going out was the attractor in Chaos Theory! In other words, it attracted everyone's attention!

There were no announcements over the loud speaker to explain what was going on and we were all just there in the dark for over an hour. Here's what happened. Although we had been a random group of strangers with random social processes, order began to emerge as predicted by Chaos Theory. Some people took a leadership role, trying to see if the doors at either end of the train car were unlocked so we could escape to another car (no luck - the doors were locked). Some people panicked and others rushed to comfort them. I sat next to a total stranger for the hour and we shared our life stories with each other in the dark. After an hour, when the train finally moved and pulled into the next station, we all got out and started hugging each other. The point is, the train stopping, the noise, the lights going off formed an ATTRACTOR and although we started out as a random group of people, we began to organize our social processes

(i.e., social interactions) around this attractor. According to Chaos Theory, all of our social processes may have originally become organized in this way.

IMPORTANT: Always remember that abstractions that are easy for you may not be easy for your clients. There are levels of abstraction... at the lowest levels of abstraction, things may seem obvious to you. For example, if I say to you “I’m going to Manhattan tomorrow” although “tomorrow” is an abstraction because it is NOT concretely here, without thinking you have a picture in your mind of what “tomorrow” is and you have no trouble understanding what I am saying.

However, you need to remember that some of your clients may have no idea of what “tomorrow” or other concepts that seem obvious, actually mean! Your clients may need you to find a way to make this more concrete. Just as I used an example to make Chaos Theory more concrete, or just as many teachers use examples to make abstract concepts clear, you may need to do the same thing for your clients.

A real example of the importance of making abstractions more concrete: Years ago, I worked in a day program for adults with developmental disabilities. One young man attending the program who had an intellectual disability, was always hungry and looked forward to lunch with a lot of enthusiasm. Because of this, when his morning activities were over and he felt hungry, he would approach random staff members and say “I’m hungry, Can I have lunch?” Staff members would answer “Lunch isn’t for a half an hour” or “Don’t worry. Lunch is soon.” The young man would wait a couple of minutes and then go ask someone else “Can I have lunch?” As you probably can guess, the young man kept asking and asking until lunch was finally served. This process resulted in staff members reacting to him with annoyance, i.e., “I told you already that lunch isn’t for another twenty minutes. Don’t keep asking me!” The young man became increasingly frustrated and agitated as a result.

Fortunately, a new social worker was hired who realized that to this young man, statements like “lunch is in twenty minutes” or “lunch is soon” were abstractions that he did not understand. She thought about ways to make this more concrete, and went out and purchased a timer (the kind used in cooking where you can set it for a specified amount of time and it rings when the time is up). She instructed the young man to come see her whenever he had a question about lunch. When he asked her about lunch she would tell him the number of minutes until lunch and help him set the timer to the correct amount of time. He soon learned how to set the timer himself when told how many more minutes until lunch and he would wait patiently until the timer rang to go to the lunch room, not bothering any other staff members. It was clear that he took great pride in having his own timer, being able to set it and waiting the appropriate amount of time.

4) Using Role Play to practice Adaptive Behavior/Social Skills

Earlier in this lesson, we stressed the importance of teaching skills to clients in the REAL environment where they will actually use these skills in the future. Sometimes, however, role play is used in advance to prepare a client for an important social situation. For example, if a client will be going on a job interview, the client's chances of success will be greatly increased if he or she has the chance to practice important interview skills first, before the actual interview takes place. Role play is a teaching technique that can be effective in these kinds of situations. Role play is where the professional and client re-creating as closely as possible what might happen in the real situation such as a job interview. In other words, in this case, the professional plays the role of the job interviewer and the client plays the role of the interviewee. Through role play, the client and professional act out a job interview, giving the client the opportunity to practice his/her interview skills and prepare for the kinds of questions he or she may be asked.

REQUIRED ASSIGNMENT: Be sure to do BOTH parts!

Part 1: Learning from your own experience: If you are in this class, you have spent at least thirteen years in school where you have been exposed to a variety of teachers, teaching styles and teaching methods. Based on your experiences with various teachers, write an essay answering the following questions:

- Think about teachers you have had who have helped you learn - what teaching strategies did these teachers use that worked well? Explain.
- What ways did these teachers relate to you that you helped you? Explain.
- Think about the BEST teachers you had over the years. What was it about them that made them so helpful? Explain.
- Think about teachers you have had that did NOT help you learn. What did these teachers do that was NOT helpful? Explain.
- How did "bad" teachers relate to you in ways that were NOT helpful? Explain.
- Think about the WORST teacher or teachers you have had. What made them so bad? Explain.
- After thinking about the BEST and the WORST teachers you have had, what specific tactics did you learn that you could use when you are teaching ADLs, Adaptive Behavior, and Communication to clients?

Part 2: Practice making abstractions more concrete.

- Imagine you are working with a client who stands too close to other people when he is talking to them. As a result, many people avoid your client and this hurts his feelings. People have repeatedly told your client "don't stand too close to people" but you realize that "too close" is an abstraction that your client doesn't seem to understand. How would you make this abstraction ("don't stand too close") more concrete so your client will understand?

-Imagine that your client is going for his first job interview. You find yourself telling him, “always dress neatly for a job interview” and then you realize that “dress neatly” is an abstraction that he may not understand. How would you make this abstraction (“dress neatly”) more concrete so your client will understand?