

## Educational Support Cell (ESC)/TLDE Tips & Strategies

*“A good teacher, like a good entertainer first must hold his audience’s attention, then he can teach his lesson.”*

*John Henrik Clarke*

### **The Effective Lesson**

In this three part series, we will explore how to design an effective lesson. Like a good paper, a lesson must have an opening, a body, and some sort of closure. No matter how you define a lesson ---a 50 minute segment to a two- day undertaking---a scientifically designed lesson will assist with long-term transfer of information as well as more actively engage your students to make learning more relevant and applicable.

In this series, we will review the critical elements of each component of an effective lesson, suggest applicable strategies for each, and discuss why each is important. However, keep in mind that while each component of a lesson is critical, real learning occurs with the synergy among all three---when each one is designed and implemented in the lesson in a way that actively involves your learners.

### **The Opening**

As the above quote by J.H. Clarke states, if learning is to take place, instructors must first gain the attention of their students. Let’s face it. With our audience, people will sit still without disruption and at least feign an interest in what we are teaching. The true magic here is to adhere to principles of adult learning; this means assisting your learners with figuring out how what they are about to learn is relevant to what has come before and/or why the new content/skill has importance to the bigger picture of what they are trying to accomplish. The key here is the assist THEM in making these connections...not just make the connection for them and move forward. If you recall from the Instructor Preparation Course, students make the biggest connection to learning when we involve their affective domain, meaning they feel an emotional connection to the subject being introduced. In order to capture this emotion, instructors must carefully plan an opening strategy for the lesson to help learners link to prior knowledge or previous experience.

According to long-time educator and researcher, Dr. Max Thompson, there are two key factors-- meaning and emotion-- which primarily influence what our brains learn. This only gives further

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-Support to Leadership & Professional Development Initiatives;

-Support to the development and implementation of program evaluation and assessment systems; and

-Support to the design and implementation of SOF Career Pathways.

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evidence to support the importance of designing and implementing an effective opening motivator, activating strategy, or concrete experience at the start of any lesson.

### **Strategies to try**

When planning an effective opening, it is critical to consider the topic and audience as well as the time allotted for the lesson. Traditionally, the opening should only take approximately 10% of the total time allotted for the lesson but just because it is short does not take away from the power of this component. Examples of effective opening strategies include brainstorming activities, making predictions, use of humor, role play, simulations, storytelling, video clips, pictures, art, games, and more. The experience should tie directly to what will be taught during the body of the lesson and help learners make some type of connection from their prior knowledge, experience, or emotion. An effective opening can ensure as the quote from John Clarke stated, that learning will take place if the teacher is able to capture the attention of the students.

### **Strategies NOT to try**

Just as important to understanding some of the examples of effective strategies to motivate learning in the opening, it is also important to realize and understand what are not effective. For example, an effective strategy to motivate learning is **not** an announcement of what is going to happen, a list of new content, or an activity which has nothing to do with the content of the lesson. Therefore, when planning an effective opening for your lesson, watch out for these pitfalls.

### **Final Tips**

Again, in determining what you want to use as an effective “hook” to your lesson, you must also be aware of *WHEN* you need to use an opening. Even though a module has been written as a 20 hour block of instruction does not mean that you should use 2 hours (10% of the time) on Day 1 as your opening and then just drive on. Determine where you are using transitions within the larger time frame and use “mini-openings” throughout the module. Peaking your learners’ interest and allowing them to determine the relevancy and the connections in their learning will not only make more engaged learners, but will actually assist with the long-term transfer of information that we, as instructors and training developers, ultimately crave.

Finally, if you can plan a strategy in your lesson to “hook” your learners and capture their interest, you will certainly see the benefits as they continue to make connections and explore the relevancy of the material through the rest of your instruction.

Next month, we will review tips and strategies to developing an effective body of the lesson. As always, if you would like to further this discussion, the ESC stands by to assist.