CHOOSING APPROPRIATE TEACHING METHODS

How do we choose between the various teaching methods that are available for use in the communication curriculum? What can we expect each different method to achieve? Placing the available methods along the following continuum helps guide our decision making:

Methods all along the continuum are useful; none is without merit. Practical considerations such as availability, cost and time constraints all influence the choice of method. But whether a given method is effective depends ultimately on the outcomes you are trying to achieve.

DIDACTIC

The didactic end of the continuum includes lectures, group presentations and reading. Although these methods may be stimulating, they tend not to lead to changes in behaviour or to the development of skills. Such facilitator-centred methods where the learner’s role is more passive can stimulate interest, promote thinking, expand understanding, help develop conceptual frameworks, but alone rarely lead to action or sustained change. Didactic methods enable learners to understand what it takes to communicate effectively but do not develop learners’ skills or ensure mastery and application in practice.
EXPERIENTIAL METHODS LEADING TOWARD DEEPER DISCUSSION OR UNDERSTANDING

Moving along the continuum towards the middle ground, we find a set of experiential methods which lead toward deeper discussion or understanding but are still at a remove from changes in behaviour. These methods are however more likely to engage the participants and increase the level of response and involvement. Examples include live demonstrations, ‘trigger tapes’ (brief recordings used as triggers for discussion and role play), workshops, discussions and exercises.

EXPERIENTIAL METHODS LEADING TO ACTION OR CHANGE IN BEHAVIOUR

Finally the continuum moves to experiential methods which lead to action or change in behaviour. Here one learner undertakes an interview while others observe. Learners engage in feedback about the interview, rehearse alternative approaches or specific skills and perhaps try again in part or in full. Performance becomes a significant part of the course content. Experiential methods are more likely to result in experimentation with alternatives, changes in attitude and behaviour, development of skills and strategies (rather than just deepened awareness and understanding) and action. The difference between didactic and experiential methods is the difference between knowing about effective communication and being able to communicate effectively.