Quality Improvement Agency

How could we change our teaching methods to meet the needs of adults with learning difficulties?

The focus of post-16 policy is increasingly shifting towards *how* students learn. But a recent research review found that a similar shift in focus is not happening where adults with learning difficulties are concerned. What changes do we need to make?

Amongst other things, studies in the review showed the importance of how important it is to target communication skills, particularly for learners with profound and complex learning difficulties. They suggest that teachers need to be more aware of the range of ways through which learners may communicate, eg. through gesture and facial expression.

There was evidence too that activities such as storytelling helped people with learning difficulties to learn more about themselves and increase their ability to express themselves. For example, one study showed that belonging to a storytelling circle improved the social and emotional well-being of the learners as well as engaging them in a meaningful activity.

The review also suggested that:

- where the learning takes place is just as important as what is being learned. Teachers should help learners to make connections between formal (college or work) and informal settings (home, community) to help them transfer and generalise skills

- making learners active participants increases their social and emotional well-being

- ICT and multimedia should be central in supporting learning and social inclusion rather than being seen as a useful, but peripheral tool.

Take action

Could you:

- ask adults with learning difficulties to tell you 'the story' of their most successful learning experience and unpack with them what made it work?

- use what you find out to review what and how you teach them?

Evidence source

Dee, L., Devecchi, C., Brian, L., and Cochrane, S. (2006) Being, having and doing: Theories of learning and adults with learning difficulties. Learning and Skills Research Report
www.lsrc.ac.uk/publications/index.asp