The Mini-Lesson

What Is It?

A mini-lesson is a short lesson with a narrow focus that provides instruction in a skill or concept that students will then relate to a larger lesson that will follow. Mini-lessons can be used to teach particular skills, extend previous learning, create interest in a topic and generate questions, or introduce strategies.

Why Is It Important?

The mini-lesson allows a teacher to convey a tip or strategy to students (Calkins 1986). Sharing tips and strategies in this way allows students to gain valuable, relevant skills on a regular basis without spending too much time on a drill. Lessons can focus on any number of OEC Topics.

When Should It Be Taught?

The mini-lesson serves as a lead-in to a larger lesson in just about any topic or skill and can as long as fifteen minutes.

What Does It Look Like?

The mini-lesson may be taught to a whole class, a selected small group, or individual students. The mini-lesson should be short and focused on one strategy, skill, or concept. Introduce the topic; show the strategy, skill, or concept; guide student practice; discuss the topic; volunteer more examples; and talk about what was taught. Upon conclusion, you will have the change to check whether the student has mastered a topic/skill or might need to revisit guided practice.

A great place to find ideas for mini-lessons are located in the teaching lessons on the NSP Education Resources portion of the NSP website. An opportunity to create relevance to the individual class needs would be to deconstruct observations and analyze the following questions: What are your students struggling with? What errors pop up in their work over and over again? Use this information and frame it into the next step learning opportunities.

How Can You Measure Success?

The measure of success of the mini-lesson; look at student ability to meet objective and retain information.  Higher levels of learning are measured in the Scenario where the student is able to problem solve and determine a plan of action with multiple variables.

It may be necessary to do more than one mini-lesson on a given topic before mastery is seen throughout the class.

**Below are six teaching strategies for making lessons more applicable to your students.**

**Keep It Relevant**Adult students latch onto lessons they feel are relevant to their lives. They have to understand how the skills they learn are relatable. If they believe a lesson will have a measurable impact, they will be far more likely to engaged and internalize the lesson. How do you get there? Helping your students see the relevance to the outdoor environment will provide the anchor for learning. Through our Instructor Development, this could be your hook to initiate lessons or skill lessons. Relating the topic to real-world authentic outcomes is an inspiration for securing the learning.

**Be mindful to the life experience the student brings to the classroom.**

One of the many differences between adult learners and their younger counterparts is their experience. Adult education has to draw on the fact that students have far more life experience. This means that your educational content must reflect the level of education they have completed, what their daily lives are like and what they are looking for out of a course. If you’re teaching a certification class for engineers, you have to use the terminology and concepts they use on a daily basis. Failure to do so makes your course seem less relevant.

**Incorporate Emotion Into Lessons**

Successfully teaching adults means remembering that these learners often identify more with content that is emotionally driven. This will make your course more relatable and can give positive encouragement and motivation that a student needs to succeed. This can be achieved through storytelling. Draw on real-life experience, your own or your students’ experience. Create a visual element to accompany the lesson and attempt to weave interactivity throughout. When content has an emotional connection to adult students, they will pay more attention to the lesson.

**Encourage Exploration**

Adult learners would prefer to explore a topic on their own. This format is often called “didactic teaching,” according to Adult Education and Lifelong Learning: Theory and Practice. In didactic teaching, activities and assignments are designed to give students the chance to learn on their own. The central theme of a lesson is a question or problem that needs to be answered or solved. This lets students integrate their own personal experience into what they are learning. Teachers should offer group projects that inspire true collaboration and exploration. If your students can arrive at the topic on their own, it will resonate more.

**Make Assignments Convenient**

Assignments should be convenient to complete. Small blocks of text, bullet points, and numbered lists can help make content far more digestible than long readings. Some assignments can even be completed via mobile devices, so students can finish them anywhere. When you offer more opportunities for students to finish assignments, they are more likely to do them.

**Always Offer Feedback**

If students make an error, offering immediate feedback can make the lesson much more effective. When students are unable to grasp a concept, offer an alternative approach or explanation. This gives students the chance to make mistakes, but learn from them quickly. Waiting too long to give feedback is never advised but especially when teaching adults. This can lead to missing opportunities.

*Modified from: Pointpark.edu*