MODULE 6: THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

Cognitive Goals

At the completion of this module the student-instructor should be able to:
6.1   State the importance of a positive learning environment
6.2   List desirable behaviors for students in your classroom setting
6.3   Identify unacceptable student behaviors
6.4   Describe methods to engage students in the learning process through a positive learning environment.

Psychomotor Goals

At the completion of this module the student-instructor should be able to:
6.1   Create a positive learning environment given a group of students in a classroom setting
6.2   Role-play effective methods of engaging students in the learning process as described in this module

Affective Goals

At the completion of this module the student-instructor should be able to:
6.1   Appreciate the importance of a positive learning environment and the overall impact that has on the success of a class
6.2   Act as a role model for the positive behaviors expected in the classroom setting
6.3   Discourage rude, offensive or distracting behavior and language in students

Declarative

I.   Why is this module important?
   A. A safe or positive learning environment is one in which students and faculty are free from harm, discrimination and teasing; where tolerance and acceptance are present; where new ideas and creative problem solving are encouraged; and where students can ask questions and learn without fear of mental or physical discomfort
   B. Promote learning with a positive environment
      1. Where practical, involve students in deciding what they will learn as this can help motivate them to want to learn
         a. Example: if you are covering several unrelated topics in class allow them to decide which order the presentation of topics will follow
      2. Give students choices about how material will be covered
         a. Evaluate students learning preferences and styles and integrate activities and learning experiences into their class that target their preferences
      3. Communicate expectations (in writing and verbally) to the students regarding:
         a. Course participation
         b. Grading policy
         c. Attendance

      d. Reading assignments
      e. Grievance procedures
    4. Emphasize the most important material in the curriculum
      a. Use the NHTSA/DOT course objectives, job description, and task analysis to determine what is the most relevant information to cover
      b. Identify from the language of the objectives the level (depth and breadth) the material should be covered
        i.   Module 8: Domains of Learning provides more information on the concept of depth and breadth of objectives
    5. Make lectures and activities relevant to the content area
    6. Make additional resources available
    7. Design classroom rules to foster learning and discourage negative behavior
  C. The value of a positive learning environment
    1. Students learn better and faster when basic needs are met
    2. Require repetition of skills performance, even when the student performs the skill well
      a. Repeat practice on more than one occasion
        i.   Reinforces student attainment of the level of mastery required
        ii.   Demonstrates student is able to maintain proficiency
    3. Allows students to grow by taking risks in the classroom
      a. Encourage safe experimentation for alternative methods to learn the content of the course
    4. Provide a safe place to make mistakes
      a. Builds confidence
      b. Nurtures students who are experiencing difficulty
      c. Builds leaders by encouraging students to extend their abilities

II.   Desirable student behaviors
  A. NHTSA/DOT NSC for EMT-P has an evaluation instrument which is used to evaluate the affective domain
    1. A copy of this document is included in the appendix
  B. Desirable student behaviors or characteristics to reinforce include:
    1. Moral integrity
    2. Strong work ethic
    3. Honesty
    4. Courtesy
    5. Respect
    6. Engaged and active learner (an active participant taking responsibility for their actions)
    7. Knowledgeable
    8. Competent
    9. Values life-long learning
    10. Are there other characteristics?

III.   Undesirable student behaviors to discourage (or not reinforce):

1. The opposite behavior of each characteristic listed above is undesirable and should be discouraged
2. Lying
3. Cheating
4. Stealing
5. Violence
6. Intolerance
7. Prejudice
8. Carelessness
9. Unprofessional behavior
10. Unprofessional appearance

IV. The instructors impact on the learning environment:
   A. Model desirable behaviors
      1. If you want students to value personal protective equipment use it when demonstrating skills
      2. If students are expected to be on time to class do not be late
      3. If you expect a high level of skills proficiency monitor their practice closely and provide timely and constructive feedback
   B. Make time for conferences and meetings outside of class time
   C. Arrive at the classroom early
      1. Set up equipment and arrange room
   D. Be over-prepared for the presentation
      1. Review the objectives for the course (or lesson) and compare to Bloom's Taxonomy to determine the depth and breadth required to meet the objective
         a. Refer to Module 8 for more information on the Domains of Learning
         b. Know the information two levels deeper than students need to know it
         c. Because of memory degradation present more information than the objective indicates
      2. Have a back-up method of delivering content in case AV resources or equipment fail
         a. Have slides or overheads of the material on video or an alternative topic to cover
         b. Make a commitment that canceling class because of an AV or equipment problem is not an option
   E. Ask for help when needed
      1. As an entry level instructor you should expect that your employer and supervisor will assist in your growth and development as an instructor
      2. Seek out a mentor to guide you
         a. Senior instructor who models quality
         b. Does not have to be an EMS instructor
         c. If an EMS instructor, select someone with high levels of student success
            i. High pass rates and/or low attrition rates
   F. Remain current on skills and knowledge
      1. Attend workshops
      2. Learn about education theory and practices

        a. Do not limit your opportunities to the EMS environment
        b. Consider taking courses at a college or university
    3. Join the National Association of EMS Educators and other professional educator groups and organizations
    4. Observe other instructors as they present and watch what works and what doesn't
  G. Watch your language content and tone of delivery
  H. Be honest and frank with students
  I. Accept the uniqueness of others and show your students that you appreciate their individuality

V.   Maintaining a positive classroom environment
  A. Model behaviors expected of students
  B. Have rules and enforce them consistently
    1. Provide written copies of the rules (via a student handbook) and review in the first class session
        a. Require written verification of receipt and review of rules
        b. Review rules periodically as this is less threatening than confronting a student directly and it may correct minor behavior discrepancies
    2. Be consistent in enforcing rules and regulations
        a. Follow them exactly, then dispense flexibility where appropriate
        b. Easier to "lighten up" than "tighten up"
        c. Challenging to start with inconsistency then try to regain control
  C. Reinforce positive behavior
    1. Sincerely praise students who exceed expectations
        a. Provide explanation so praise is tied to specific behavior, not to "pleasing" the instructor

VI.   Use progressive discipline principles in managing conflicts or problems in the classroom
  A. Encourage self-policing
    1. Can only be accomplished when student knows rules and regulations
  B. Identify student leaders to help with problems in the classroom
    1. Leaders can help police problem students
    2. Monitor closely to ensure that it is a fair application of the rules
  C. Document disciplinary actions and provide copies to the student, course director, medical director and other members of the teaching team as appropriate
    1. It is necessary to obtain permission from the student to release information
        a. Obtain written permission in first class session
        b. Give the student a copy of the signed document and place the original in the student's file
  D. Seek guidance on disciplinary matters from members of the teaching team: faculty, administrator and medical director

VII.   Positive design elements for the physical classroom space
  A. A clean, safe, and well-maintained classroom space promotes learning

B. Handicap accessible and in compliance with all federal, state and local access laws
C. Adequate size room for student needs
    1. Appropriate workspace with tables, chairs and desks
        a. Comfortable furniture
    2. Room for practical skills development and practice
    3. Desks arranged so students have an unobstructed view of the instructor and any AV materials that may be used
    4. Secured storage area for personal effects
D. Located close to amenities: food service area, break room, restrooms, kitchen area, etc.
E. Good environmental controls of classroom
    1. Room should have comfortable temperature with good air flow
    2. Adequate lighting
        a. Independent controls for various lighting levels are ideal
        b. Ability to block out natural light
F. Area should be capable of minimizing distractions by closing doors or walling off the space
G. Adequate equipment
    1. Adequate amount in good working order
    2. Appropriate storage
        a. Arranged logically so equipment is easy to find
        b. Safely stored so injuries cannot occur from falling objects or trip hazards
        c. Secure area
    3. Appropriate management and storage for soiled equipment, supplies and biohazard material

VIII. Strategies of arranging the classroom
  A. Classroom Arrangement Strategies - illustrates classroom arrangement styles for various settings and needs (see Appendix for Classroom Arrangements)
  B. Lecture style
    1. Teacher centered approach
        a. Instructor is positioned in front of students with desks lined up in rows
        b. FYI: student centered approach enables student to be "center" of learning environment
    2. Optimal set-up for situations when students are together to give out information prior to dividing into groups
    3. Not recommended for small group work or psychomotor skills development
    4. May allow students to "hide" behind those in front of them
  C. Theater style
    1. Teacher centered approach
    2. Instructor is centered in front of the students but the student's desks are arced in a half-circle around the instructor and may be arranged on terraces or levels (amphitheater)
        a. The instructor can see every student
  D. Circle, square or rectangle with open center

1. Combined teacher and student centered approach, depending upon how it is used
2. Chairs or desks arranged in a circle, square or rectangle with an open space in the middle
   a. This allows for the formation of a very large circle
3. Instructor may sit with the group or may enter the center area
4. Ideal set-up when all students are expected to participate as it allows each student to see the other
5. Good set-up for a discussion

E. Circle, square or rectangle with closed center
1. Student centered approach
2. Chairs or desks arranged in a circle, square or rectangle with no open space in the middle
   a. This allows for the formation of a smaller group setting
3. Instructor should sit with group to participate or stand off to the side after providing any instructions
4. Ideal set-up when all students are expected to participate as it allows each student to see the other
5. Good for a discussion group

F. Partial circle, square or rectangle with an open area
1. Combined teacher and student centered approach, depending upon how it is used
   a. Focus is on person centered at the front of group but configuration allows for discussion and interactivity as well
2. Chevron or "U" shape also possible

G. Individual workstations
1. Student centered
2. Some multimedia environments are designed as individual workstations
   a. These areas are difficult to use when a "teacher centered" approach is required as many participants may be unable to see the instructor
   b. You can improve this environment if you provide additional faculty facilitators to circulate around the room assisting students
   c. This is an ideal environment for individual instruction or for groups of 2-3 students to work relatively uninterrupted

H. Group workstations
1. Student centered
   a. Instructor should circulate around the room or have additional instructor facilitators assist in monitoring the work of the individual stations
   b. Focus of instruction is within the space of the individual table or station
2. Tables or workstations oriented within a large open space
   a. Visualization of each station may not be an issue but it can be controlled with partitions or room dividers
   b. Chairs can be placed around the tables or workstations
3. Adequate room should be maintained between stations to allow for movement and to reduce the noise level at the station

4. Groups can be working on the same activity simultaneously (but independently) or different activities
5. Allows for multiple activity stations
   a. Instructor balances between monitoring activity and allowing student to direct their own learning
   b. Student can rotate between stations independent of instructor or as directed
   c. Student can progress around the room in a group or individually, depending upon how the instructor sets up the activity

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