Key Elements in Workshop Design

This outline is a summary of Preparing, Designing, Leading Workshops: A Humanistic Approach by Susan Cooper and Cathy Heenan (1980). Boston: CBI Publishing Co.

I. Gathering Information about Participants

A. Knowledge of the subject
B. Size of the group
C. Gender, age, marital status, ethnicity
D. Belief systems, social and political orientations
E. Needs
F. Voluntary versus mandatory
G. Familiarity of the participants with each other

II. Fun

Learning does not have to be painful. Work at exciting the "child" that lives in all of us. More fun for you, as a trainer, as well as for participants, if your "child" is involved. Learning will be hindered if the attention of participants is limited.

III. Time

Know your limits in terms of realizing your goals. Consider the following questions:

A. How much time are you allotted?
B. Are you building-in breaks?
C. Are you building-in time for reflecting and integrating?
D. Are you taking into account slippage (what you may not anticipate can still happen)?

IV. Appropriate Sequencing

There should be a natural flow to your design. Allow yourself to be sensitive to what you have come up with; ask yourself:

A. Does the design have a beginning, a middle, and an end?
B. Does each part of the design naturally flow into the next part of the design?
C. Have you followed the principles of sequencing?

V. Simplicity

Beginning designers often make their designs too complex., The design needs to be easy to understand for both you and the participants. If you have had to read it over several times yourself, it is probably not simple enough.

VI. Variety

People are touched on several levels. Not all people learn from or are motivated by the same means. If you can include an appeal to the emotional, intellectual, physical, and spiritual parts of self, there is a greater chance of fuller response from the participants. Although this is not always possible, strive for it.

VII. Sharing Your Expectations

Most people like to have a sense of what to expect -- how their morning will go, the day, or the eight-week course. Since most people are coming to your workshop with expectations, it is better to know in the beginning so you can respond to their inquiries, "Yes, I think that will be met," or, "No. I had something else planned." Thus you share your expectations and find out theirs.

VIII. Climate-Setting

The atmosphere or setting is an essential components in planning your design. Consider the following:

A. Size of physical space
B. Furniture arrangement (are pieces moveable?)
C. Comfort (chairs, mats, pillows).
D. Lighting
E. Temperature
F. Ambience (conducive for exploring, safety, intimacy?)
G. Availability (will you have to move locations if workshop is ongoing?)

IX. Pacing

We each have an inner clock; no two persons' clocks are the same, though they may be similar. Paying attention to your pacing and to the participants' pacing is important. People require time to absorb material and experiences. Consider the following:

A. What is your rate of presentation (talking, exercises) -- too fast, too slow?
B. Are you packing-in too much, or are things lagging and do people seem bored?

X. Flexibility

If after completing your design if it does not "feel" right, trust your feelings and re-work the design. If while carrying out your workshop. significant learning and/or events are happening, be flexible. Remember that some activities/experiences may take more time than others or have more. impact than you may have imagined.

XI. Evaluation

Paying attention to the "energy levels" of the participants and yourself will help you evaluate the workshop while it is still in progress, and at its conclusion. You may make last-minute changes throughout the experience according to your ongoing evaluations. Concluding evaluations serve the dual purpose of giving the trainer feedback and helping participants integrate what they have learned.

A. Ongoing evaluations
B. Concluding evaluations

Five Easy Steps to Developing a Dynamic Design

This outline is a summary of Preparing, Designing, Leading Workshops: A Humanistic Approach by Susan Cooper and Cathy Heenan (1980). Boston: CBI Publishing Co.

Step 1. Establishing and Listing your Goals

Be specific. "A goal is an end one strives to attain." Goals. can be both cognitive and emotional. Many people confuse goals and methods, so be sure your goal states the end result you wish to attain.

A. Ask yourself the following:

1. What do you want to see happen?
2. What do you want people to go away with?

B. Determine whether or not your goals can be met in the allotted time

C. In case time is inadequate, prioritize your goals and set reasonable time limits for each

D. Organize your goals in terms of a logical flow

Step 2. Brainstorming Methods

Considering one goal at a time, "brainstorm" methods for meeting that goal.

A. Be creative-assume the sky is the limit.

B. Exhaust all possible ideas.

C. Take off on your own or on other peoples' ideas.

Step 3. Selecting Methods and Structures

When you have exhausted through brainstorming all possible ideas, it is time to select the one(s) to use.

A. Select methods that will best achieve your goals, while taking into consideration the elements of a good design.

1. Structured experiences
2. Non-structured experiences
3. Lecturettes
4. Processing
5. Discussion

B. Select the most appropriate structure by which to implement the methods you have chosen.

1. Intrapersonal
2. Interpersonal
3. Small group
4. Intergroup
5. Whole group

Step 4. Assessing the Design

Once you have finished your design it is essential to evaluate it, both objectively and subjectively, using the following criteria:

A. Determine whether your goals are clearly stated and whether the methods you have chosen meet the goals.

B. Determine whether your design meets the requirements of "Elements of a Good Design".

C. Determine whether or not the design "feels" good to you. Ask yourself:

1. Am I comfortable with this design?
2. Can I pull this off -- is it "me"?
3. Would I enjoy this design if I were a participant?

Step 5. Revising the Design

If the answer to any of the questions in Step 4C is "no", you need to make some revisions in your design. After you have made the necessary revisions, again go through the evaluation process until you can honestly answer "yes" to each question. At that point you can consider your dynamic design complete.