

Towards Facilitating a Workshop
contact elizaBeth simpson with comments, additions, questions, critiques
elizacorps@yahoo.com

PTO-Specific Note: If you have any questions about what will be in the rooms, please ask Ben Fink at ben.fink@gmail.com.

Introduction

This document is part of an ongoing attempt to offer and develop a general buffet of tools for people facilitating workshops through a social justice lens- whether the workshop is explicitly about such concerns or not.

The people involved in its creation take as a premise that you, dear reader, have a range of experience such that some of these ideas and tools will be familiar or even redundant, while others may be new. Many are touchstones that we feel need to be returned to over and over again as we deepen our capacity to be socially aware and responsible. It is necessarily incomplete! There are many specific techniques for particular workshops that are not included here (e.g. working on specific topics, or with specific demographics, or in specific locations, or in caucus groups, and on and on...). As we build our library with your help, we hope to make such pamphlets available. We invite you to support this process by sending in your feedback- additions, critiques, questions, and comments.

Planning the Workshop

Identify your Objectives: Think of what you want this workshop to accomplish. Are their particular things you want participants to learn? Experiences you want to foster? Connections you hope are made between participants? Why is it important to you that this happen? Why is a workshop the appropriate venue to further these goals? Think of a few key objectives that you can refer to during planning and 'in the moment' during the workshop to keep you on track. (e.g. “My goal is to support embodied movement. What choice will best support embodied movement?”)

Celebrate and Utilize Folks' Experience: It's an accomplishment to get a group of people together in a room. How will you draw on the experiences of the participants in such a way that if any one of them were missing, the workshop would have been different? If it is a workshop you are after, consider in what ways you are not only “disseminating information” (lecture) but creating the context for a participatory experience (workshop)?

Structure Your Session: However experienced you are, or however much you like to 'go with the flow and let it happen organically' everyone will benefit if you plan your session in advance. Bring clear notes or an outline to work from.

Make a Handout: We strongly encourage you to make a sheet with key points, references, resources, and your contact info. You can bring a small number and have people sign up to have it emailed to them so you don't waste paper if you like. Consider making it in a re-useable format such as a zine that will be kept, or that can be distributed beyond the context of the workshop.

Allow for Different Learning Styles: Because many people learn differently, consider incorporating a variety of forms into your workshop:

- say things aloud
- write words on a board/flip chart
- draw pictures on a board
- have a handout with pictures/words
- have people use/feel their body
- space for thinking
- small group sharing
- large group sharing
- pair sharing
- ask people to write
- ask people to draw

There are a variety of approaches to working with different learning styles. Two approaches are:
Multiple Intelligences

http://www.thomasarmstrong.com/multiple_intelligences.htm

Ways of Learning (synopsis of Multiple Intelligence approach):

- words (linguistic intelligence)
- numbers or logic (logical-mathematical intelligence)
- pictures (spatial intelligence)
- music (musical intelligence)
- self-reflection (intrapersonal intelligence)
- a physical experience (bodily-kinesthetic intelligence)
- a social experience (interpersonal intelligence)
- an experience in the natural world. (naturalist intelligence)

Bloom's Taxonomy

<http://eduscapes.com/tap/topic69.htm>

Types of activities and verbs used to describe objectives (synopsis and examples from Bloom's Taxonomy)

- Knowledge- define, memorize, repeat, match, record, list, recall, name, relate, collect, label, specify, cite, enumerate, recite, tell, recount
- Comprehension- restate, summarize, differentiate, discuss, describe, recognize, explain, express, identify, locate, report, retell, review, translate, paraphrase
- Application- exhibit, solve, manipulate, interview, simulate, apply, employ, use, demonstrate, dramatize, practice, illustrate, operate, calculate, show, experiment
- Analysis- interpret, classify, analyze, arrange, differentiate, group, compare, organize, contrast, examine, scrutinize, survey, categorize, dissect, probe, create an inventory, investigate, question, discover, inquire, distinguish, detect, diagram, chart, inspect
- Synthesis- compose, set up, plan, prepare, propose, imagine, produce, hypothesize, invent, incorporate, develop, generalize, design, originate, formulate, predict, arrange, assemble, construct, create
- Evaluation- judge, assess, decide, measure, appraise, estimate, evaluate, rate, deduce, compare, score, value, predict, revise, choose, conclude, recommend, determine, criticize, test

Setting up the Space

Spatial arrangements contribute to the meaning of the workshop. Therefore, make specific choices that line up with your objectives. Do you want chairs in a circle? Space cleared so that everyone begins by moving around? Do you need desks? Will you be showing slides? Check out the room you will be in ahead of time, and make sure you have the supplies you'll need.

Supplies

If your workshop requires materials or supplies, anticipate how much you will need and who will bring them. Don't take anything for granted- e.g. if you plan for participants to write, bring paper and pens. If you need electricity, confirm an outlet and power cord. For technology users, check that your software, operating systems, cords, jacks, etc. are compatible, including audio and video (CDs and DVDs).

Timing

Things Start Late: Plan to have 15 minutes less time than you think you have. You can use it for feedback, closing, etc.

Pack Light: Choose a few juicy topics rather than squeezing a lot in. If there are a lot of important points to cover, provide a handout so it's okay to not get to it all. Prioritize content that can't be looked up (like people's experiences).

Anticipate Your Time: Things usually take longer than folks expect. The smallest time increment that should be planned for in a workshop is 5 minutes, and most things take 15. Think through what you are doing in real time- even act it out. Can you really give your explanation in 10 minutes? Are you leaving room for clarification? What about transition time between activities or locations?

Check in: Bring a timer or easy-to-read watch with you. Check in frequently so that you have an awareness of where you are in your plan in light of the time you have left. Use your time-anticipation skills and key objectives to make healthy real-time choices about what you want to do as you go. As possible, get input from the group on what is important to them.

In the Session

Pace Yourself: If you are in a rush, things will seem panicked. Take breaths between paragraphs, refer to your notes to make sure you're on track both with time and content, and cut things instead of cramming them in. If participants seem rushed, or are 'crowding the floor' invite people to wait 5 seconds between responses to help open access

Don't Fake It: If you don't know an answer, say so. Consider asking if anyone else knows. Take care not to speak for other people/groups without context. (e.g. "My knowledge of that comes from bell hooks' writing, in which she says...")

Know Your Limits: If you need at least a certain amount of people, or can't handle more than some amount, put a limit or minimum on the workshop and stick to it. Don't be wooed by the lure of a larger crowd- better to do a smaller workshop than one that doesn't go well.

Watch Your Airtime: Unless you are giving a lecturette or instructions, aim to speak only 20-30% of the time. Participants have a lot of wisdom to learn from each other and themselves. Consider reframing what you want to add as a question so that others might provide it instead. If you do plan, in advance, to speak at any length, value everyone's time by thinking of what you want to say ahead of time, write notes for reference, and refer to them before speaking.

Ways of Speaking: Notice how you talk: the language you use, volume, tone, what direction you are facing, etc. Notice how people respond. Along with this, notice who you feel comfortable engaging with, who seems to be 'getting it' and who isn't. Additionally, be aware that many facilitators will unintentionally orient themselves to one side of the room (often the left), or to specific people, and challenge yourself to be inclusive. Create venues for feedback. Ask for the exceptions: Can anyone not hear me? Who doesn't agree? Who isn't clear on what we're about to do?

Opening the Space

Name Objectives: Say what you anticipate will happen and ask if there is something else folks were expecting. Be clear about whether you think you can get to items that are outside your intended topic area. If you can't, give options (resources) if you have them, and say if you don't.

Make/Name Safer Space/Ground Rules:

Ideally, get this from the group- but it might be time-smart not to. If so, name/write whatever you think they should be, see if anything needs to be added, and get visual confirmation (e.g. hand raising) from everyone. It can be as simple as 'we've shown we're all here to learn by being in the room- let's agree to view each other as working together'

Intros: It's good to plan that the smallest thing you ask people to say will take 30 seconds to a minute each. That means if you have introductions for 20 people, you should plan for at least 10 minutes. Does that support your objectives? Would it work as pairs or shout-outs? Would a set amount of time for mingling and a key question work? e.g. You have 5 minutes to find out why other people are here OR to learn something unusual about as many people as you can. How important is it that people in the room know who else is in the room?

Ongoing Feedback: Consider giving some options for in-process feedback, like agreement/so-so/disagreement as thumbs up, sideways or down, or red card, yellow card, green card. You can be creative, but take into account how outgoing a person will need to be to use what you offer. Should it be verbal, visual, spatial, etc?

Closing the Space

Outcomes: At the end of the session, summarize what happened and what wasn't gotten to.

Closing: It's useful to have a closing of some sort. Ideally it has some room for feedback about the workshop (what did you encounter you didn't know before? What did someone say that was helpful to you? What do you still not know? What would you tell someone else about this?) These can be written or verbal. Minimally have a one word go around or talk in pairs for 2 minutes each about the experience. A chance to speak personally (pairs) plus in the group (go around) plus written feedback for you is a nice combo, time providing. Taking notes on participants' verbal feedback can be a good resource for future workshops.

Follow Up: Give people next steps: resources (books, websites, etc), questions, action items. If you say you're going to look something up, or otherwise get back to someone, do it. Don't be afraid to under-commit and over-deliver.

Contact: Let people know how to reach you, if you are open to further contact.

Ways to Facilitate

Constraints for Participation: You can set limits and minimums: no one can speak until 3 other people have spoken, only someone who hasn't spoken yet can speak, wait 5 seconds between speakers, only people of a certain group participate, ask Jane to hold off for a while. Remember that 'going with the flow' often means going with social norms where people who are used to getting to speak do and people who are used to not being heard aren't. It's your job to counter the social norms in these spaces and be vigilant about folks having the option to share, even if they don't take it.

Call on People: Invite someone who hasn't spoken, or someone who's doing that 'I have something to say but can't get a word in' twitch if they want to add anything. If they defer, let it go.

Stacking: People raise their hands to speak and you keep track of who was first. Consider asking people to not repeat ideas, having the stack expire after a set amount of time, resetting it as a new topic arises. You might suggest that you'll wait to call on someone until 5 hands are in the air. That way you can choose those who need a little more time to put together a thought rather than always going with those who are ready to share first.

Additives Only/Brainstorming: When coming up with ideas, it can be helpful to put a moratorium on naysaying (e.g. 'that won't work'). This can be described as 'addition not subtraction'. People can add thoughts but not take any away.

Straw Polls: Ask participants to raise their hand, or put up fingers on a scale of 1-5 (or 1-10), to get a quick sense of the group.

Activity Formats:

Popcorn: Participants blurt out ideas as they arise

Go Around: Go around the room and give each person the option to speak. Consider a time limit. Always give the option to pass. Consider going back around to the people who passed to see if they now have something to share. If pressed for time, suggest a structural limit like "3 words." Sometimes this structure propels not only concision but creativity!

Caucus Groups: Participants divide up such that people in a particular identity group are with each other. Weigh the balances of having people self-select or be identified by others. (e.g. 'people who identify as ...' In contrast to 'people who are identified as...') This can be an activity in itself, or can lead to others.

Think /Pair/ Share: Participants write down responses to a prompt, then share thoughts with another person/group, followed by a large group debrief.

Social Drawing: Have people draw something related to the content, then ask participants to place the drawings in relation to each other in a way that seems relevant. This can be on a table, the floor, or around the room. Consider a limit of “only one person can move a picture at a time.” At first, have participants do this silently, with awareness. Then encourage people to name what they see.

Concentric Circles: People stand in concentric circles, inner circle facing out, outer circle facing in, so that everyone has a partner. Ask a question, say which circle will start, and give each circle the same amount of time to talk to their partner. Then have one circle move clockwise so that each person has a new partner, and ask a new question. This is great for getting personal with a number of people quickly. ! TIPS: guide listeners to give their whole attention, even when the talker isn't talking. Remind talkers that they get the WHOLE TIME, and that even if they are done they still have the space/time to use.

Images/Frozen Pictures: Have participants divide into at least two groups and create a ‘sculpture’ of an idea. While one group holds their form, the other observes. Then switch. (see Facts then Interpretations)

Facts then Interpretations: When asking people to discuss, consider having them first name the physical occurrences they saw/experienced (objects, people, colors, volume, etc) before naming the interpretive descriptions (mean, happy, kind, arrogant...). Of course both are relative!

Doing our “Social Justice Homework”

It is ongoing work to check into class, race, gender/sex/orientation, ability, “expert/authoritarian”, U.S.-centric, and other power dynamics and where we fit in all that. Try to look at your workshop through an anti-oppression lens, asking: “What undersirable power dynamics might I be supporting/ignoring/perpetuating? In what ways is this workshop liberatory? As members of target or agent groups both, we can carry inherited patterns without noticing it. Consider finding a peer/ally to help you, or read up on social justice folks who come from your social identity group. In this process be gentle with yourself- we're in it together, and we “make the road by walking”.

Transparency: If there is something you can't address or didn't anticipate- especially an ‘elephant in the room’, name it. (e.g. “this space isn't wheelchair accessible”).

Context: To help contextualize the workshop, name where you are coming from (e.g. “... as someone from a raised-middle class background...” OR “As a trans person...” where appropriate.

Short List of Resources

Zen of Groups Dale Hunter
Positive Discipline Jane Nelson
Parent Effectiveness Training (P.E.T) Thomas Gordon
Games for Actors and Non-Actors Augusto Boal
Pedagogy of the Oppressed Paulo Friere
For Your Own Good Alice Miller
Anything by bell hooks