Experiential Learning Design & Facilitation

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Overview

Effective facilitation of adult learning must go beyond just "telling" (Display of Slides and a Q&A). It must engage participants so that they can remain engaged and focused on the content and be able to apply what they have learned outside the class and back in their lives.

To achieve this, content developers and facilitators must pay attention to Adult Learning Theory and apply the principles therein to using a variety of experiential, discover-based learning techniques, tools and activities.

These activities can be incorporated into the design of learning interventions and captured in the Facilitators' Guides that will drive the actual delivery of the trainings.

This technical paper introduces Adult Learning Theory and some of its implications and then explores a variety of experiential, discovery-based group facilitation activities/techniques that you can adopt and apply.

Adult Learning Theory

Andragogy - adult learning is quite distinct from pedagogy (traditional educated targeted at children and youth). Adult Learning Theory is built on the following truths about adults in a learning environment, originally articulated by Malcolm Knowles:

Adults **have a base of knowledge and experience** already unlike children, so it is important to engage them adequately and include their existing knowledge and experience into your design and delivery.

Adults **need to understand why they are learning** and how they will apply it to solving real-life problems. Your content and delivery should therefore focus on exploring the importance of certain bodies of knowledge and getting participants to reflect on and plan for how to apply the knowledge after the training.

Adults **need to have control,** so you must reflect this in your design and delivery by democratizing some aspects of your delivery and given your participants choices about groups to which they belong, and how they go about certain activities, for example.

Adults are more **interested in learning things that they can use immediately**, so be careful in your needs analysis and in selecting participants for a training. It is also important to ensure proper context in content design and delivery, so that examples and references are relevant to the participants and their realities.

Like children, adults also have different learning styles and preferences. Auditory learners learn by listening; visual learners enjoy pictures, kinesthetic learners learn by doing; logical learners enjoy solving problems and analyzing; social learners enjoy working with others and learning with others; solitary learners prefer to learn on their own; while verbal learners like to talk and express themselves when learning.

One of the ways to apply these principles and preferences into the design and delivery of your trainings is to use experiential and discovery-based techniques and activities in your training and build them into your lesson plans and content right from the beginning. Here is a non-exhaustive list of a number of experiential techniques and activities that we have used and found very useful:

S/No	Technique/Activity	Description/Benefit
1.	Write-Along Workbooks	This is one of the best ways of ensuring that participants pay attention and stay engaged during a workshop.

		Adults can be easily distracted, and by getting to write along as you speak and capture key words and phrases or fill in the blanks, you ensure that they pay attention.
2.	Pre-Reading	You can give participants a case study or other reading material before the training. This way they can start to think and reflect on the content and the subject matter. The Pre-Reading can even be discussed at the beginning of the training.
3.	Read and Discuss	One of the challenges with adults today is that we do not read enough. Giving participants something to read and discuss in your workshop will challenge them to read and inculcate reading habits. It also builds their ability to analyze and interpret written information.
4.	Group Quiz Competition	You can put participants into groups and ask each group to challenge each other with difficult questions to test their knowledge of the content. The groups will set questions and pose to each other and you will act as an umpire.
5.	Puzzles	Crossword puzzles and other forms of puzzles are great in stimulating the analytical capacity of participants and they are also fun. You can create puzzles on the content itself using a variety of free and licensed apps.
6.	Pre-Tests	One way to get participants to pay attention to the content is to give them a pre-test. They will tend to pay attention more to find the correct answers to questions they got wrong.

7.	Post Tests	The post-test is a great way for you to evaluate transfer of knowledge. You can compare it to your pre-test scores to measure learning transfer. It is great for Monitoring & Evaluation (M&E) activities and reports.
8.	Virtual Games	For a younger generation of participants, virtual games that may include scenarios and tests will be fun and engaging. They can be built with eLearning authoring tools like Articulate. Older adults also enjoy them. Gamification is an important part of modern learning.
9.	Mind-Mapping	This tool is useful in getting participants to come up with ideas especially in training related to communication skills or content development. Mind mapping is a powerful tool for coming up with creative communication ideas.
10.	Brainstorming	This is useful to get participants to come up with ideas to solve a problem. There are many methods of brainstorming like round-robbin, free-wheeling, slip method, etc.
11.	Brainwriting	This is a unique form of silent brainstorming and is considered one of the most effective ways of brainstorming.
12.	Teach Back	Participants can be challenged to teach-back certain parts of the content to the rest of the class. This is a good way to assess their actual capabilities.

13.	Case Studies	Case studies are a great tool to get participants to connect to a real-life situation. Stories are a great way to teach lessons and case studies are stories related to your content.
14.	Turn to Your Partner	This can be done from time to time to get participants to talk. It is very effective because everyone gets to talk to each other, get their views heard by others and this can all be achieved within a very short period of time. It is a better way to get people to talk while managing time compared to asking everyone to talk one by one to the entire room.
15.	Matching Games	Participants can be challenged to match concepts to each other. This challenges then to read, analyze and make connections. Matching can be done by drawing a line to connect the related concepts on a worksheet or in the workbook.
16.	Board Games	Board games are an important tool of gamification that can be used to enhance learning experiences. You can visit www.bebetterbooks.biz to take advantage of board games in a variety of learning areas.
17.	Card Sort Games	Participants can be asked to sort out information written on cards. For example, organizing facts related to certain subjects; descriptors of values, etc.
18.	Action Planning	At the end of each lesson or module, participants can be asked to come up with an action plan for applying what they have learned back at work or in their lives.

		They can also be asked to plan a project using a project planner by assigning tasks to different people with clear deliverables and timelines.
19.	Commitment Sheets	Similar to the action planning sheets, commitment sheets can even be created and sent to the participants' supervisors, spouse or other accountability partner as they commit to doing things differently after the workshop.
20.	Role Plays	A role play is an opportunity for participants to act out or demonstrate something like giving feedback, listening, responding to a complaint, coaching or counselling. Usually there will be an observer to give the role players feedback.
21.	In-Basket Activities	Rather than just discussing a case study, an in-basket challenges participants to act out their ideas on the case study like a role-play. So instead of just commenting on the case study on leadership and saying the character should have been more professional with his feedback, you will be required to demonstrate through a role play what professional feedback is.
22.	Journaling	Participants can be given a notebook to journalize - capture notes of important things that they do and learn during the workshop and ideas for implementation, after the workshop.
23.	Reflective Practice	Similar to journaling, participants can be asked to reflect on something and come up

		with ideas/responses/actions based on their reflections.
24.	Root Cause Analysis	To analyze problems and challenges, participants can use the Why Tree or the Fishbone diagram together.
25.	Group Discussions & Presentation	Participants can be pooled into various groups to discuss an issue and then make a presentation to the entire group.
26.	Group FAQs	Participants can read a material together, discuss and learn from each other and then come up with questions that still require clarification which they will now ask the facilitator. Some people call it "Face the Facilitator"
27.	Lunch and Learn	During a long lunch break, participants can continue specific discussions in groups while enjoying their meal. This way, the learning continues, and it also encourages participants to bond with each other.
28.	Videos & Discussions	Videos should be used to engage participants. They could be documentaries, drama, excerpts from movies, seminars or even TV interviews. They are very effective in bringing in the ideas and perspectives of experts into your workshop.
29.	Traffic Lights	This can be used to get people to think about what they should STOP doing (Red), Continue doing (Amber) and Start Doing (GREEN). You can create a worksheet with these colours to use for this activity.
30.	Physical Games	There are a variety of physical games that you can use as icebreakers and warmers

		and also to teach valuable lessons in leadership, communication, customer service etc. like bingo, Jenga, building straw towers, blindfold games, crossing the great divide etc.

These experiential techniques, approaches and tools are by no means exhaustive and they can be deployed in a variety of creative ways and customized to fit various situations.

Armed with these tools, you can be sure that your participants are engaged and learning and that they will be better prepared to translate their learning into action and results, post-training.