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TRAINING STRATEGIES

What methods and techniques should you use to facilitate youth learning? Practitioners surveyed for this sourcebook identified the following 10 strategies as particularly effective in youth media programs.

Experiential Learning

Experiential learning focuses on moving participants through four stages of a learning process—**experience, reflection, generalization, and application.**

Start with an exercise or participatory presentation that gives learners the opportunity to experience the topic hands-on. Allow time afterwards for reflection so they can deconstruct and analyze the experience and develop their ideas and feelings about the topic. Encourage participants to draw broader conclusions through generalization and identify what they learned from the process. Finally ask the learners how they can use their new skills and knowledge in the future and how they can apply the lessons learned to new situations.

“Many of the activities and lessons we planned were based on the model of “Learn, Use, and Reflect,” a principle emerging from the service learning movement. This meant that the knowledge was never abstracted away from its direct application or use. The minute they learned something, they began to use it. If we taught about camera angles, they immediately had to perform all of those camera angles. After the completion of that exercise, we would watch, critique, evaluate, and then review what was learned. We did a great deal of summation. Each reflection period became a chance to link what was learned back up to the larger picture and the overall goal. But the reflection component was not just a summary or review, it was a chance for participants to engage in dialogue, discussion, and evaluation.”

MINDY FABER, VIDEO MACHETE

Create a Learner-Centered Curriculum

Understanding participants' needs, experiences and goals is key to creating an appropriate training curriculum. Discussions, activities and learning aids (e.g., audio-visual examples, production exercises, visiting speakers) should be applicable to the life and world of youth. One way to ensure this relevance is to get participants to share information, stories and viewpoints with the group. Open dialogue can help learners develop and strengthen their ability to diagnose and solve their own problems and creatively address their issues, concerns or interests.

“One of the best practices that we use is to try to make everything we do relate to the “real world” that youth are going to encounter. We try to concentrate on life skills. Video and television are the mediums that we use, but the skills of teamwork, organization, writing, working with clients, making the deadline, being accountable, having integrity, and producing quality work all can be translated into other professions. . . . The other thing that really helps is to put youth in charge of everything and then get out of the way. When they need you, they will find you. My greatest joy is being in the edit suite where five or six kids are all on task, doing work that is meaningful, sometimes talking to themselves as they work out a problem at the desk, asking each other for help, or watching a cut for advice. Sometimes the only reason I am on location with them is that I am the only one with a driver’s license and a credit card!”

BJ HAWKINS, VID-KIDS

Taking a Facilitator’s Role

Rather than imparting one’s own store of knowledge, the goal of the media trainer should be to facilitate a process of competency-building and self-discovery for youth. Think of the participants as the “experts” who best understand their issues, culture, ideas and needs. The training process then becomes a mutual learning experience.

Encouraging Questioning and Investigation of Reality

Create an atmosphere where everybody (including the trainer) can express themselves freely, ask questions and learn. Provide opportunities for participants to express and understand their perceptions of reality in relation to others in the group. Sharing information, stories and viewpoints with others who have had different experiences is a powerful way to gain new perspectives. Doing this in an atmosphere of trust and respect builds a learning community, develops collaboration skills and encourages collective effort.

“From day one, it’s posted clearly for all students that the program is project based and that the direction and responsibility for the projects are of a collaborative and collective nature. Sessions are interactive with hands-on activities. Camera workshop exercises are a good example. The teacher starts by hooking up the camera to a monitor and follows with a demonstration on how the camera works. The demonstration is broken down into segments so that students can immediately try every feature. As one student tries, the others are asked to notice the changes in the image on the monitor. All students take turns and as each practices on the camera, the others are asked to explain what is happening and why. The teacher is there to help the students discover how and why things are happening without lecturing them and overloading their brains with technical terms. While technical terms are important because they facilitate communication among the crew, they will be learned slowly and by repetition during the exercises and the recording of the program.”

TATIANA LOUREIRO, DOWNTOWN COMMUNITY TELEVISION

Encouraging Group Work

Engage participants in cooperative learning activities. This brings diverse individuals together to negotiate common understandings, create common goals and figure out how to best work as a team. These skills can carry over into other aspects of participants’ lives. Group work provides youth with the opportunity to meet and get to know others, feel part of a team, do something fun and different, and contribute to a project that they think is important (all of which can lead to eye-opening experiences).

Promoting Collective Learning and Decision Making

Placing a strong emphasis on problem-solving activities can foster teamwork and encourage peer discussions. Provide opportunities for the group to make collective decisions based on the participants’ experience. Devote time to discussion within the group to develop confidence in analyzing and finding solutions to local problems.

Facilitating Peer Learning

To build skills, self-confidence and interest, create ways for participants to learn from one another. In workshop settings, try dividing the group into pairs and have one member from each pair complete a technical exercise and then show their partner how they did it. The opportunity to share ideas and techniques reinforces learning, promotes collaboration and fosters self-confidence.

Peer training is a key ingredient of Youth Impact's overall strategy. There are some youth who have been with our project a number of years and have developed professional level skills in various aspects of audio production. We have found that these youth are excellent role models and quickly develop a rapport with new and younger recruits. The training sessions led by these peer trainers tend to be more informal and relaxed and the younger students see people close to their age mastering the technology, having fun with the whole production process. We think peer training is an empowering experience for both our veteran participants and the new students being exposed to media production.

ARTURO VASQUEZ, KXCR YOUTH IMPACT

Varying Activities Throughout Each Session

Diverse training activities accommodate different learning styles and engage participants on different levels. Combine equipment practice, critical viewing exercises, discussions on media arts and group work in your trainings. Get young people's hands on equipment first, and share media theory and program philosophy later. Spend time engaging in group discussion, production exercises, and looking at and talking about media pieces.

Incorporating Examples of Non-Traditional Media

Showing as much alternative media as you can gives youth a sense of the possibilities outside of mainstream media. Use examples that reflect the perspectives of public access television or media arts. Sharing and discussing video or radio clips is a great way to break up a workshop and let people see and feel the difference between community media and mass media. Exposure to new ways of representing ideas can also broaden a young mediamaker's approach to his or her own creative work.

Vid-Kid Media Instructor Bj Hawkins assists videographer Ginny Babcock at the Listen Up! "New Voices, New Activists" weekend workshop.



Integrate Evaluation Throughout Training

Integrate simple methods of evaluation throughout the training to ensure that the curriculum (activities, emphasis, time allocation) is meeting participants' needs. Alter the training to satisfy participants' needs as much as possible. Always address participants' concerns in a public setting whether you can do something about them or not.

TOOLBOX

Recommended Training Strategies by Members of the Listen Up! Network

- ▶ Create a tone in the training that identifies the youth as artists. This identification gives them the power to create their own styles and statements rather than imitating mainstream TV.
- ▶ Use hands-on activities on the first day to inspire a sense of comfort and playfulness and to eliminate any feelings of intimidation.
- ▶ Give participants clear roles, responsibilities and guidelines to build their sense of ownership and organizational capacity.
- ▶ Engage in inter-group dialogue to identify what young people are really interested in working on and to enhance group communication skills.
- ▶ Let youth develop their ideas as a group and decide together what they want to create. This encourages a sense of empowerment and builds decision making skills.
- ▶ Teach facilitation skills to trainers and participants to make the workshop more dynamic and inclusive.
- ▶ Set aside time in the training for people to talk about themselves, what's important to them or why they came to learn to make media.
- ▶ Team teach if staff resources allow (make use of interns, senior learners). Have one facilitator instruct while the other walks around and demonstrates or provides support to learners.
- ▶ Include critical analysis throughout the mediamaking process to sharpen viewing, dialogue and production skills.
- ▶ Hold debriefing sessions after different segments of the training so participants can reflect on what they are learning and how they feel about it.

“Some of the most successful activities in the MAGIK workshop for girls are “warm-up” and “cool down” exercises at the beginning and end of the sessions. For example, to encourage trust and community-building exercises we play a circle-shape-name game. Standing in a circle, each participant says her name in turn and makes an accompanying shape with her body. The other participants repeat her name and shape. This was particularly successful because it involves body movement and addresses the need for more physical activity for young women. Cool-down activities usually consist of open discussion and snacks. This provides an opportunity for process evaluation, as well as community-building.”

DALIDA MARIA BENFIELD, VIDEO MACHETE

We practice the empowerment of youth through media production and media literacy. While much of the work is achieved through multiple activities, we do some things that have instant results. For example, we believe strongly in developing safe adult/youth relationships. Our youth can set up one-on-one mentoring sessions with our staff to discuss and work on projects, everything from 15-minute shorts to 24-second PSAs. Another example would be the ways in which we offer youth leadership positions. We invite them to meetings with funders and other organizations and let them take their work to the street to show people. We also provide them with YEP! — Youth Establishing Policy. YEP! consists of a Saturday workshop where youth facilitate meetings around programming and more involved interests. In the past, youth have created a peer mentoring program and have taken on more in-depth training in editing.

JENNY HANSON, PCTV

See the **SAMPLES** section for more ideas to help you design strategies for active training programs and training techniques.