Memorable workshops: Adding variety to our sessions

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Abstract

This article presents many ways of engaging participants in workshops based on the work of Howard Gardner on multiple intelligences: linguistic, logical-mathematical, visual-spatial, physical (kinaesthetic), musical, inter-personal and intra-personal. The article provides useful suggestions on how to prepare, design and deliver inspiring and useful workshops.

Introduction

SF practice by its very nature involves a lot of talking: it's an approach that uses the power of language to make progress in the desired direction. And so it is not surprising that in workshops designed to teach SF, participants spend much of their time working in groups of 2 or 3, "pairing and sharing".

However, there are many ways to engage participants and to help them learn, and working in this way, punctuated by input sessions (telling and/or showing), is not the only one.

Current thinking is that the best way to help a group of learners to learn is to use whole brain learning: appeal to all the learning styles and intelligences, include movement, use colour, change states often, get learners physically involved and have fun. The work of Howard Gardner (1993) can be a useful guide to finding different processes to add variety to a workshop.

Howard Gardner (1993) observed that IQ is not a good predictor of success in the world and wondered what was missing in the conventional understanding of what is meant

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by intelligence. He developed a different theory of human intellectual competence – the idea of Multiple Intelligences – which is helpful in designing training courses, whatever the topic.

Gardner identified seven different intelligences; linguistic, logical-mathematical, visual-spatial, physical (kinaesthetic), musical, inter- and intra-personal. The main characteristics of these intelligences are summarised in Appendix I. Reflection, pairing and sharing are activities which appeal to intra- and inter-personal intelligences – but what about people who learn best when the other intelligences are engaged? Appendix 1 also has suggestions about the kinds of activity which appeal to people strong in the various intelligences.

At the SFCT Trainers Conference in 2011, I led a one-hour workshop in which participants were invited to devise activities designed to give their course members experience of various SF tools, using different combinations of the intelligences. This was a highly experiential session, with very little time taken up by my talking – the input was provided by way of a handout for people to read later if they so wished.

In this article, I will outline what happened in the workshop itself before adding some general remarks about workshop design.

The workshop

I brought some props with me to the workshop: an i-pod on which to play welcoming music; toys to add colour and kinaesthetic opportunities; laminated posters with colourful graphics showing the main characteristics of each of the 7 Intelligences to put on the walls; a pack of "Happy Families" cards (a children's game using picture cards, featuring illustrations of fictional families of four, most often based on occupations – for example Mr & Mrs Baker and their son and daughter); cards with the graphics illustrating some of the SF tools as described in Jackson & McKergow (2007) – Future Perfect, Counters, Scale & Affirm; cards showing one of the 7 intelligences.

I prepared the room by fixing the posters on the walls around the room and scattering the toys on the seats. After a very few opening sentences introducing myself and giving a quick outline of the session, I invited participants to walk around the room looking at the posters and then to stand beside the one which best described their own particular preference. They were then asked to talk to the people at the same poster about what kinds of activity most appealed to them.

As a quick, random and fun way of getting people into groups, I asked everyone to come and pick up a card from the Happy Families pack and then find other members of their family. Then the "adults" were asked to randomly choose 2 of the Intelligence cards and the "children" to choose one Tools card.

The task for each Family was to devise an activity designed to let learners experience the use of the Tool they had chosen, in a way that would appeal to the two Intelligences they had chosen. I asked them to produce a flip chart with the instructions – and then to be prepared to brief the other participants as if the whole group was actually going to do the activity. Finally, the flip charts were all put onto the wall as if in a gallery and everyone was invited to view them all. Readers can see some of these for themselves at http://gallery.me.com /alankay7777#100286. Thanks to Alan Kay, one of the participants at the workshop, for these photographs.

Appendix 2 gives some idea of the variety of activities available – with some gaps to test the reader's ingenuity!

Designing workshops

Beforehand

Of course, preparation takes place long before the trainer arrives at the venue. The letter of invitation or joining instructions can do a lot to prepare participants for what is to come – and to create feelings of anticipation, curiosity and motivation. This is where what the therapists call pre-session change takes place: when participants are prompted to think

about what they already know about the topic and about the benefits of coming to the training, for them, their colleagues and their clients.

Then, the room has to be prepared before the learners arrive. Pre-school teachers know a lot about this and we can take a lesson from their craft. They know that children's curiosity and desire to learn is enhanced by a rich environment. They prepare the room accordingly: with colour, with material on the walls to remind the children what they have learned, with toys for the children who can't sit still without playing with something, with flexible seating so that they can work alone or in different groups . . . Adults are also well served when their trainers take care in getting the room ready for learning – and, being just bigger versions of children, their desire to learn is also enhanced by a rich environment.

At the workshop

Then there's the session itself. Here, variety is key: to good learning, to good interaction among participants, to confidence, to having a good time . . . Start with the big picture (this applies equally to the whole event and each segment) so that participants have some idea where they are in the scheme of things and what is to come. Change your process frequently: short periods of input followed by activities in which the learners have the chance to try things out for themselves. Make sure that learners have time to reflect on what they have done and to think about what it means to them. Be creative in finding different ways of pairing people up and in allowing people to move. There is no reason why people have to be seated throughout the event: encourage them to work standing up, going for a walk or sitting on the floor.

Briefing

Think carefully about how you brief participants before they start an activity. SF practitioners often talk about "useful misunderstandings" but, to my mind, not all misunderstandings

are useful! It can be very frustrating to participants not sure of what they are supposed to be doing or how it fits in to the session and frustration is not conducive to good learning. So here are some hints about good briefing:

- Most importantly, be sure in your own mind what you want the participants to do – and what you hope will be achieved. Be clear about what points **you** want to emerge in the de-brief
- Make sure that you have any materials needed to hand
- Consider giving a demo first
- Be confident and willing to join in if necessary, for example if the numbers don't stack up
- If it's a multi-stage activity, brief it step by step. This reduces the chances of some people rushing ahead, of details being forgotten and of the trainer repeatedly having to explain things
- Another possibility is a written brief in a handout – or use PowerPoint to show the steps one at a time
- Be clear about who people are to work with – there are lots of creative ways to form pairs or threesomes
- Be clear about what the end point is – a flipchart with pictures? lists? reflections?
- Tell the participants how long they have got. Being spuriously precise eg "you have 5 minutes and 12 seconds" strangely is more informative than "you have 5 minutes"
- Be willing to be spontaneous – especially in the case of useful misunderstandings!

Of course you will have your own ideas about what people will have gleaned from the exercise you have given them – and they will not be the only ideas! Be prepared to meet each suggestion with interest and curiosity, using positive language wherever possible.

Celebrating success

Affirmation is a key tool in the SF toolkit. Make sure you have it with you at all times!

Conclusion

Further information about brain-friendly learning can be found in Jensen (2008) and Hare and Reynols (2005). Adding variety to your workshops is good for your participants – and good for you!

References

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Appendix 1 – The Seven Intelligences

(Acknowledgements to Linda Campbell, Bruce Campbell and Dee Dickinson, "Teaching and Learning through Multiple Intelligences")

Linguistic intelligence

A person could be described as having well-developed linguistic intelligence if they:

- learn through listening, reading, writing and discussing
- listen and read effectively, comprehend, paraphrase and interpret
- speak effectively to a variety of audiences using appropriate styles
- write effectively, using a wide vocabulary and correctly apply grammar and punctuation
- exhibit ability to learn other languages
- demonstrate interest in journalism, storytelling, debate, poetry.

Using Linguistic Intelligence

- Write a legend, poem, short play (etc) on. . . .
- Conduct an interview of. . . .
- Conduct a debate on. . . . .
- Write a newsletter on. . . .
- Give a presentation on. . . . .
- Write a letter to. . . . . . about. . . . . . .
- Create a talk radio programme on. . . .
- Invent slogans for. . . .
- Use storytelling to explain. . . .

Mathematical/logical Intelligence

A person could be described as having well-developed mathematical/logical intelligence if they:

- use abstract symbols to represent concrete objects and concepts
- demonstrate skill at logical problem-solving
- perceive patterns and relationships
- enjoy complex operations such as calculus, computer programming or data gathering and processing
- make hypotheses, formulate models and construct strong arguments.

Using Mathematical/Logical Intelligence

- Create a mathematical formula to describe. . . .
- Design and conduct an experiment to. . . .
- Use Venn diagrams to explain. . . .
- Make up analogies to explain. . .
- Design a code for. . . .
- Categorise facts about. . . .
- Describe patterns in. . . . .
- Construct a sequence for. . . .
- Create a timeline for. . . . .

Physical Intelligence

A person could be described as having well-developed physical intelligence if they:

- explore objects and the environment through touch and movement
- prefer to touch, handle or manipulate what is to be learned
- develop co-ordination and a good sense of timing
- learn best by direct involvement and participation
- show dexterity in working with muscles and hands

- have the ability to fine-tune and perfect physical performance
- demonstrate balance and precision in physical tasks.

Using Physical Intelligence

- Create a movement or sequence of movements about. . . .
- Build or construct a. . . .
- Invent a floor game for. . . .
- Plan and attend a field trip that will. . . .
- Devise a treasure hunt to. . . .
- Design a product to. . . .
- Choreograph a dance of. . . .
- Role play or simulate. . . .
- Make puzzle cards to. . . . .
- Use hands-on materials to demonstrate. . . .

Visual/Spatial Intelligence

A person could be described as having well-developed visual/spatial intelligence if they:

- learn by seeing and observing
- navigate themselves and objects effectively through space (body through apertures, car in traffic etc)
- perceive and produce mental imagery, use visual images as an aid to recall
- decode maps, charts and diagrams
- enjoy painting, doodling, drawing etc
- enjoy constructing 3-D products, and can mentally change the form of an object.

Using Visual/Spatial Intelligence

- Chart or map. . . .
- Design a poster or videotape of. . . .
- Develop architectural drawings that. . .
- Colour code the process of. . . .

- Create a slide show or mural of. . . .
- Create mind maps of. . . .
- Make advertisements for. . . .
- Create artwork to show. . . . .

Musical Intelligence

A person could be described as having well-developed musical intelligence if they:

- listen and respond with interest to a variety of sounds, including the human voice, environmental sounds and music
- enjoy and seek out opportunities to hear music or sounds
- respond kinesthetically to music by conducting, dancing, or performing; emotionally by responding to moods; intellectually by discussing and analysing; and/or aesthetically by exploring the content and meaning of music
- develop an ability to sing or play an instrument
- enjoy improvising and playing with sounds, and can complete musical statements in a way that make sense.

Using Musical Intelligence

- Give a presentation with appropriate musical accompaniment on. . . .
- Write song lyrics for. . . .
- Sing a rap or song that explains. . . .
- Indicate the rhythmic patterns in. . .
- Present a musical on. . . .
- Make an instrument and use it to demonstrate. . . .
- Collect and present music to. . . .
- Write a new ending to a song so that it explains. . . .
- Explain how the music of a song or tune is similar to (or different from). . . .

Interpersonal Intelligence

A person could be described as having well-developed inter-personal intelligence if they:

- bond and interact with others, recognising and using a variety of routes
- form and maintain social relationships
- perceive the feelings, thoughts, motivations, behaviours and lifestyles of others
- participate in collaborative efforts and assume various roles as appropriate in group endeavours
- understand and communicate effectively in both verbal and non-verbal ways
- perceive diverse perspectives in a social or political issue
- adapt behaviour to different environments or groups, and in response to feedback from others.

Using Interpersonal Intelligence

- Work in pairs or groups to. . . .
- Role play multiple perspectives on. . .
- Teach someone else about. . . .
- Lead a discussion on. . . .
- With a partner, use "out loud problem solving" to. . . .
- Coach someone in. . . .
- Organise or participate in a group to. . . .
- Practice giving and receiving feedback on. . . .
- Using one of your strengths, assume a role in a group to accomplish. . . .
- Use others and your social skills to find out about. . . .

Intrapersonal Intelligence

A person could be described as having well-developed intra-personal intelligence if they:

- work independently
- are aware of their range of emotions
- are motivated to identify and pursue goals
- are curious about the "big questions" in life: meaning, relevance and purpose
- attempt to seek out and understand inner experiences
- gain insight into the complexities of self and the human condition.

Using Intra-personal Intelligence

- Describe qualities you possess which will help you successfully complete. . . .
- Create a personal analogy for. . . .
- Set and pursue a goal to. . . .
- Describe your response to. . . .
- Explain your personal philosophy about. . . .
- Use self-directed learning to. . . .
- Write a journal entry on. . . .
- Explain the purpose you perceive in studying. . . .
- Conduct a project of your choice on. . . .
- Self-assess your work on. . . .

Appendix 2 – Teaching the SF Tools using Multiple Intelligences

	Linguistic	Maths/ Logical	Physical	Visual/ Spatial	Musical	Inter-personal	Intra-personal
Platform	Write about the benefits. Metaphor	List benefits and prioritise them		Draw an image		Share (2s, 3s, 4s or whole group)	Metaphor or name for the project
Future Perfect	Write a screen play. Letter from the future	n "what elses"	Go for a walk. Act the screen play	Draw pictures/ story board	Find an appro-priate song title	Share (2s, 3s, 4s or whole group)	Do activity alone
Scale		Numbers 0–10 or 1–10 or graph paper	Scaling walk	Smiley faces/ ladders/ mountains	Doh re mi	Share (2s, 3s, 4s or whole group)	Do activity alone
Counters	Write a poem	Count them Categorise them	Step towards FP	Pictures. Coloured dots on lists. Mindmaps		Share (2s, 3s, 4s or whole group)	Do activity alone
Small steps	Press release	Flow chart		Drawing		Share (2s, 3s, 4s or whole group)	Do activity alone
Affirm		List n qualities	Nods Smiles	Put work on wall	Find an appro-priate song	Positive gossip	Prepare alone
Whole thing	Metaphor	3 basic rules of SF Albert model	Change seats. Stand up. Use the whole space. Go outside if possible	Albert model. Mind maps. Picture cards: eg tools, cards	Mood music in room: welcoming, relaxing, energising	Work in different groups	Reflection time for exercises