

INTRODUCTION

This workshop focuses on how to effectively engage communities in meaningful and relevant work. In this session, participants will go through a series of creative exercises that foster conversation and collaboration. This is an ideal workshop for educators and designers who are looking to develop courses or projects in—and with—communities.

Bernard Canniffe has led this workshop at design conferences and universities around the world.

See more at:

<http://designconference.aiga.org/program/schedule/design-you-mean-it/#sthash.2LWkl64E.dpuf>

METHODOLOGY

Normally, when I lead these workshops they are secretive in both outcomes and structures. I do not inform any of the participants what they will be doing because it is essential that all participants experience being uncomfortable.

This “discomfort” allows participants to then have peak experiences when they engage with and in real communities.

Here is an example of one workshop methodology so you can take a look at. It is very important that you do not share this information with anyone else. If people know what they are going to do before it happens it will spoil the end results.

I think it's best if the participants self identify issues, and it's always good to include a broad range of people in the workshop. These participants can include community organizational leaders, community members, designers, design students, business leaders, government officials etc. But, the best results, from these types of workshops, occur when everyone engages with people on the street, in random places and inside communities.

These workshops are scalable. I have run these workshops with as little as eight people and as many as one hundred people. I have lead these workshops with students only (undergraduate, graduate, art and design students or non art and design students). I have also lead these workshops with business leaders only and with government officials only. But all workshops involve a real community.

Example Exercises I

Dance: The dance exercise is important because everyone looks silly, nobody is an expert and everyone has to take risks.

A. Divide the entire workshop into subgroups. These subgroups can be large or small. In the past I have had five subgroups of twenty participants in each, and I have had two subgroups with as little as three participants in each.

What is important is that you have subgroups.

B. It is important that every subgroup is isolated from each other subgroup. They should not be able to hear or see the other groups.

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C. Divide the main group into subgroups and then inform each subgroup to go to a different location.

D. Instruct each subgroup, individually, that they are to teach the other groups how to dance.

I inform each subgroup the dance name and then leave them to figure out how to complete the task. It is very important that you do not rescue anyone-do not tell them how to solve the problem.

I normally give them between 10-20 minutes to complete this task.

It is important to note that everyone learns something new and teaches someone else how to do it.

Next, you bring all subgroups back together again and you tell everyone not to speak. You ask for a volunteer subgroup and when they have nominated themselves you ask them the following questions.

“Are you ready?”

“Are you sure you are ready?”

And just before they are about to start you ‘derail/disrupt’ them.

For example, you blindfold them, or you don’t allow them to speak, or you ask them to lie down on the floor, or you make them sit on chairs.

After the first group finishes their exercise, you move onto the next subgroup and you ask them the same questions as you did of the first subgroup.

“Are you ready?”

“Are you sure you are ready?”

Then you derail/disrupt the this exercise differently than you did with the first subgroup. For example, if you blindfolded the first group, then you make this group lie on the floor.

You go through all subgroups and derail/disrupt every group differently.

The processing of each of these experiences is the most important aspect of the workshop. Sit them down and begin the process.

Dance Examples

Waltz

Tango

Foxtrot

Samba

Disruption Examples

Blindfold/Mute/Lie Down-apart from one person/everyone holding each other’s hand

Processing

It is extremely important that you allow each group to process the activity. The emotive component of the process will become an essential tool when the groups engage with and in real communities.

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Process Questions

What did I “initially” ask you to do-describe what I asked you to do?

For example, you asked us to divide ourselves into groups

You asked us to leave the room

How did you feel?

I felt nervous

I felt awkward

I felt like laughing

How did you resolve the situation-solve the problem?

What did it take?

It took trust

It took me to breath deeply

It took teamwork

How did you feel when there was an immediate obstacle-IE Blindfolded/
Mute?

I felt awkward

I felt useless

I felt embarrassed

It was stressful

I felt we would fail

What did that look like?

I saw people who were blindfolded and falling over

I saw people with their hands outstretched

How does this experience relate to design?

We all had to solve the problem

We all had to communicate

We had to resolve the problem when were blindfolded

We had to think on our feet

Where you successful?

No-because we didn't teach people how to Foxtrot

No because we ran out of time

What is success?

Completing the task

Keeping within the time limit

I then end this exercise by informing the group that,

“Success to me, was having you come together as a community. To bond effectively and not completing the task”

Example Exercises2

Tell Trust Stories: Each person in the subgroup is asked to tell three stories about themselves that they haven't told anyone else. Each story is then simplified into one word and then all those words are compiled into a master/group story. Facilitator adds other words to distract/disrupt or abstract the story.

A. Divide the group into subgroups. These subgroups should be different than in the first exercise.

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B. Make each subgroup go into another room or a different part of the location where they cannot be seen or heard by each other subgroup

C. Make sure that each subgroup has one person with a pen and paper

D. Inform each subgroup that they are to tell three stories about themselves, to their group, that they have not told before. So, if there are three participants in a subgroup there will be a total of nine stories. Sometimes it is helpful to give each subgroup an example of what you are requiring. For example, "Bernard did this, and then he did that and finally he did this."

E. Each Story is then simplified to one word each. Again, if there are three participants in a subgroup there will be a total of nine words.

F. Finally, the group is required to place all these words together to make one big story and then perform it in front of the main group.

It is important to inform each subgroup that the objective is to make "MAKE ME LAUGH"

The idea of sharing personal/private stories is what you actually share with strangers is different than what you might share with close friends or relatives.

For example, someone might say that they stole a vehicle when they were young, and were arrested for urination, as well as singing in a band. This could be simplified to "Vehicle, Urination and Singing.

Simplification to words allows secrets to be told and performance can be an effective tool, as well as moving the group to understand that design is much broader than print and web. It is important for the groups to begin to understand that when you engage with communities the most important delivery vehicles may not be traditional design.

So, Designer as Performer
and/or Design as Performance

Each person then has three words, and if you have three people in the subgroup, then they will have a total of nine words.

Finally adding disruption words to each subgroup. It is important that these words are both abstract and absurd. For example, Pink Butterfly, Belly Button, Vomiting Caterpillar etc. You also encourage each subgroup to use any "props" that are available to them to help tell their stories.

Each subgroup performs their stories and then you sit them down to process.

Process Questions

How did you feel?

How did you resolve the situation-solve the problem?

What did it take?

How was trust used?

Is trust important?

Is trust/truth important in design?

How and where do you see these happen-give examples?

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Did you make promises to each other?
How does this experience relate to design?

I then end this exercise by informing the group that, "Truth and promise are essential when working with communities. When a community member tells you something either about themselves or their community it is only to you. You cannot place that truth on a poster, a tee shirt or a website and show the world."

Example Exercises 3

Outside/Inside: Each subgroup is asked to talk to people on the streets and in communities to find their stories. You tell the groups that the focus of this exercise is to "MAKE ME CARE"

- A. Divide the group into subgroups
- B. Inform each subgroup they are to go into the community and meet people
- C. Let the people tell you their stories-just meet people. Say hello and listen to them.
- D. Come back to the main area and then share what you heard to the entire group. Essentially each subgroup is asked to complete one master narrative to "present" to the entire group.

IMPORTANT

It is very important that you lead a group discussion about effective ways to engage people before they go out into the community.

For example, cameras can be obtrusive.

Taking notes when listening to someone can be isolating

Large groups of people asking one person questions can be intimidating etc.

They tell community stories about everyone they met. The focus of this phase is not to identify what is wrong with the community.

When the groups come back to present their community stories you ask them if they are ready. Then, you disrupt the process by informing them when they hear the bell whoever is speaking should stop speaking and the person next to them continues the story.

You listen to every story and then you process the experience by asking the following:

Process Questions

How did you feel when you went out in the community?

What did it take?

How was trust used?

How did you experience trust?

Did you make any promises to each other or the community?

What did you hear?

FACILITATION

As each subgroup is telling their community story you write down words, and phrases that you hear. You encapsulate and summarize the stories listening for familiar and similar threads. For example, there may be common trends/threads to every presentation and you use these

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presentations to understand the community and then begin to understand if it is possible to engage/respond.

It is extremely important that nobody makes promises that cannot be kept. It is also important to not ask anyone to focus on the negative aspects of the stories. The focus is to use design for good. To use design as a catalyst for change.

CREATIVE PROCESS

Next, comes the creative process.

You ask the group what do they want to do now, and how do they intend to do it, and finally why there is a need for them to do it.

This phase is followed by repeated meetings with community members and may grow to involve community leaders and community organizations or local business leaders or local government officials. These involvements are determined by the community response/community engagement.

RULE OF THUMB: The lower the budget for implementation the better, and more effective the outcome becomes

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CREATIVE STRATEGY

Invite the community, invite the media and launch it.

With the following discussion before they begin implementing the idea to include planing and strategy.

REAL and PERMANENT GOOD WRAP-UP

After the project is implemented in the community you can lead a conversation about lessons learned as well as opening up a discussion for topics that embrace real and permanent good desingers, movements, organizations, structures etc.

The final group discussion mantra can be: Make it Real, Make it Positive and Make the Media.

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