Design for Diverse Learners: Structure

How can we design learning opportunities/systems that work well for people different than ourselves?

We asked this question to each of the Community Engagement Fellows cohorts in Fall 2017, Below is the advice they shared related to the structure of learning opportunities.

Structure. *Have enough, but not too much :)*

- Let people make mistakes—don't be overly protective or prescriptive—and people will learn a lot more.

- Build in consistent feedback loops so that you're keeping an open door to adaptation.

- Be mindful of location—some spaces are intimidating, others inhibit learning and bonding; create a shared, comfortable space.

- Meet people where they are, not where you want them to be (have a hot dog feed if that's what people like and will come to).

- Follow principles of universal design for learning. This includes multi-modes of representation, expression, and engagement.

- Use Backward by Design framework—what is the absolute minimum/essential elements we want people to come away with at the end?

- Be flexible.

- Be willing to experiment and let people know you're experimenting.

- Keep the agenda simple, so there's space for all voices and clarity of purpose.

- Have the community of learners decide upon goals together.

- Use place-based learning opportunities to help break down cultural and class barriers.

- Don't underestimate the value of silence for quiet reflection and digestion.

- Have a clear understanding of your objective.

- Provide space for people to provide relevant experiences; find the wisdom in the room.

- Implement often and refine the process continually; "Design a little; implement a lot."

- Watch how people are being engaged or disengaged as you go through the process.

- Allow open-ended conversations, even though the uncertainty can create anxiety.

- Make sure you're not oversimplifying, but also honor that different people "get it" at different points in the process and show their knowing in different ways.

- Create ways for people to learn from each other.

- Make what you're doing transparent, so that people can effectively become leaders themselves.

- Hold the tension between specialization and general knowledge/connections with larger systems.

- Create opportunities for learning about other people's passions; help others identify their strengths and skills, and follow that reality.

- Don't place anyone, including yourself, in the privileged place at the front of the room.

- Create shared challenges so that you break down cultural barriers (ala Outward Bound).

- Play!

- Leader needs to have boundaries pushed as well, and be challenged by the experience.

- Use flipped classroom model, which provides space for group and community work.

- Create longer opportunities for meetings so that you can do larger projects/field trips.

- Be transparent about the limitations/failures of your learning systems.

- Consider marketing principles for inspiring behavior change.

- Keep the parameters broad so that people have flexibility in how to participate.

- Create individualized systems—not everyone has the same needs.

- Spend time establishing and practicing group norms.