

Best Practice: How to design an effective CPD training course

A well-designed learning event or training course is likely to meet with success. Design is therefore an essential step in the CPD circle. Designing learning events and training courses is the responsibility of the provider. However, in order to be able to request and assess CPD programmes effectively it is necessary for the teaching service and the school, to have a rudimentary knowledge of what quality learning and development design entails.

The first step in the design phase is verification and clarification of needs and requirements to be sure to get it right from the beginning. Otherwise the training course may not meet expectations or fulfil the identified needs.

Designing a training course involves:

- Formulating learning objectives
- Selecting learning methods
- Choosing learning technology (if relevant)
- Preparing course and module descriptions
- Preparing the programme
- Preparing a course summary for advertising and catalogues, etc
- Development of tests, assessment and evaluation mechanisms.

Learning objectives

It is important to formulate precise and clear learning objectives as these will orientate both facilitators and trainees, help to focus the learning event, and guide the selection of learning methods, tests and assessment, and the evaluation of the results. The learning objectives should reflect the identified learning needs and the competency level of the participants.

Learning objectives should be concrete, realistic and relevant to the learners and they should match exactly the actual expected outcome of the learning event. An easy approach is to base the formulation of the learning objectives on the knowledge, the skills and the attitudes the participants are expected to develop:

Example learning objectives:

- *Having completed the course, the participants will know the advantages, methods, outcomes and assessment of group assignments....*
- *Having completed the course, the participants will be able to organise pupils into groups, design group assignments, use teamwork techniques, assess results of group assignments....*
- *Having completed the course, the participants will be more sensitive to group dynamics and the needs of different individuals in a group of pupils....*

Good examples of learning objectives can be found at the start of a chapter in almost any recent academic or professional book on learning and development or training.

Learning methods

Learning methods applied during a training course often determine the degree of learning. Learning methods should reflect:

- The competency level of the participants
- Learner-orientation rather than teacher-orientation
- That it is an adult learning programme

And they should:

- Be appropriate to the subject
- Not overload the training course
- Be applied with decorum considering the sensitivities of participants
- Be applied professionally by a skilled facilitator

Common learning methods and activities		
Learning method/activity	Description	Caution
Icebreaker	People learn much better if they are relaxed and comfortable with the facilitator and their co-learners. This is the purpose of icebreakers which usually start a training session or workshop. There is a range of icebreaker activities available to facilitators which can be accessed on the internet or found in professional literature.	Icebreakers must be applied with sensitivity to the participants' social standing, culture and personal mindset. There are alternatives to icebreakers such as asking everyone to help rearrange the furniture, begin the session with plenary brainstorming, etc.

Presentation with questions and answers	<p>The purpose of a presentation is usually to present new knowledge to an interested audience. It is important that the presenter has excellent presentation skills and is able to listen to and be aware of the audience. He or she must provide opportunities for the audience to ask questions either during or at the end of the presentation.</p>	<p>A presentation should never last more than 20-30 minutes, and it is essential that the audience can participate with questions. It should be followed by relevant activities, reflection and dialogue on the subject-matter.</p>
PowerPoint slide show	<p>A PP slideshow usually accompanies a presentation. If applied correctly, it can be effective in summarising subject matter to make it easy to remember. A PP slideshow should use minimal text and apply colours, graphs, figures, tables, photos, symbols, drawings, videos, etc. as appropriate.</p>	<p>A PP slideshow should NEVER merely summarise in words the facilitator's presentation, and the facilitator should NOT stand with his/her back to the audience reading the slides out.</p>
Guest lecturer	<p>Inviting a guest lecturer to speak is a good break from the facilitator and a way to introduce real world experience to a training course. A good guest lecturer can be an eye-opener as well as an entertainer. Professional training institutes often have a cadre of experienced practitioners attached to the institute. A guest lecturer should also have good presentation and facilitation skills.</p>	<p>The danger of inviting guest lecturers is if the lecturer does not understand the learners' level or the purpose and approach of the course, or if the lecturer is very nervous or dominant. It is also a setback if the lecturer loves to hear him/herself speak and goes on for too long. The facilitator must be able to politely steer a guest lecturer.</p>
Brainstorming, mind-mapping, problem identification, etc.	<p>It can be very productive in a training course or workshop to allow the participants to identify problems and solutions themselves. They take ownership, are committed, and engage. Another advantage is that it may produce a link between learning and the real world and enhance relevance. Brainstorming, etc. provides an opportunity to discover valuable solutions to real problems.</p>	<p>The danger of this approach is if the facilitator loses control, if there is too much deviation from the plan, or if some participants become antagonistic. This approach requires a very good facilitator.</p>
Reflection	<p>Participants should be given time for reflection during a training course or learning event. This will enable participants to integrate their learning experience, learn more through reflection and identify questions to be addressed.</p>	

Group exercises and discussions	<p>Group exercises and discussions are excellent and effective ways of engaging learners actively. People in a group learn from working together and from one another. It is important that a group has a clear learning task or a set of questions which they are asked to address. For this they may have access to the internet. The group should elect a chairperson for time keeping and staying on track, a secretary to take notes, and someone to present. Results may be recorded on flipcharts or be projected on a screen.</p>	<p>Group discussions may deviate, involve too much talk, create tensions between participants, or a group may be dominated by people with strong opinions. It therefore requires a good facilitator who can steer the process in several groups simultaneously, guide them in the right direction, and answer questions.</p>
Plenary discussions	<p>Plenary discussions normally follow a presentation or a group exercise. It is a way of sharing knowledge and learning. Such discussions may enhance active participation, motivation, inspiration and creativity, and plenary discussions may produce viable solutions to issues in the real world of work.</p>	<p>Plenary discussions can go off-track and stir up tensions and arguments between participants. Sometimes a participant may take advantage of the opportunity to dominate and force through his or her own ideas. Plenary discussions require a competent facilitator who can handle situations that may arise.</p>
Individual exercises, tests	<p>Individual exercises and tests create intensive learning and enable participants to review his or her own acquired competencies and develop more advanced levels of mastery. It provides an opportunity for the trainer or facilitator to discover where improvements in skills are required.</p>	<p>In planning exercises and tests, it must be ensured that the level is appropriate, neither too high, nor too low. Attention must be given to the smooth running of the technical mechanisms and to confidentiality.</p>
Demonstration	<p>Demonstration is one of the best ways to learn a practical skill, perhaps in connection with theory and explanations. It is important the first demonstration by the facilitator is slow and step by step, and that participants all have opportunities to try it out individually. Lack of skill can be dealt with on the spot and improved upon under professional guidance.</p>	<p>It is essential trainees are given the full rationale for why things are done in a specific way. The facilitator should not run through the exercise fast, be impatient or show temper, but should be patient and encouraging.</p>

Case study	<p>The learning method of case study has been developed to advanced academic levels by universities. Case studies might involve individual as well as group work and they might be long or short. A case study is an excellent way of imitating situations in the real world and learn by exploring alternative options and opportunities and experiencing the results of wrong decisions. Case studies can be developed as online journeys into real life situations where the result of actions are dramatically unfolded.</p>	
Role play	<p>Role play simulates real life work situations. They can be useful in breaking participants' psychological barriers and develop courage to act first in an artificial setting and subsequently in the job. It provides a good opportunity to test difficult and challenging situations and develop professional working skills with colleagues under an experienced facilitator's supervision. It is also a means of seeing another's viewpoint (through acting the other) learning to negotiate, deal with conflict, and so on.</p>	<p>The facilitator must be careful not to overstep the red line of participant personal sensitivities. Another risk is if some of the players do not take it seriously at all. To plan it well and make it effective requires a good understanding of the participants' job situation.</p>
Games	<p>When you have fun, your mind is open, and you learn easily without straining yourself. Some games can also be engaging and are a good way of promoting full attention. Games are socially fulfilling. Games might be a way of learning how to solve real life crises situations and problems, in the worst case learning by mistake (but without causing any harm).</p>	
Videos	<p>Videos provide an excellent break to the flow of demanding instruction and exercises, and at the same time enable participants to learn in a relaxed fashion. Timing is important, for instance entertainment in evenings, after lunch when participants need to digest or in the late afternoon.</p>	

On-the-job practice	Learning in the class or conference room may be enhanced considerably by practical on-the-job learning and job assignments which may take place during an interval in the course or after completion. It is important to reinforce learning through trial and error and through applying what has been learnt.	If learning is not reinforced by putting it into practice during or soon after the learning event a valuable investment may be lost. If one doesn't apply acquired competencies, one is likely to forget the knowledge and the skills.
Various online and distance learning methods and blended learning	Online programmes, distance learning, e-learning, mobile learning, etc. are becoming increasingly popular and have many advantages such as low cost for the participant, the possibility of learning at home in free time, distribution of learning opportunities to a large number of learners, reaching learners in remote areas, etc. It may involve webinars, short programmes on YouTube as well as long complete educational degree courses. Blended learning means e-learning with short periods of face to face classroom-based session, which can be an advantage for the long education programmes.	Learners may feel isolated and lack motivation and stimulation provided by group training. Trainers and facilitators, though there, are mechanisms for communication, do not have the same grasp of the individual participants or the opportunity to focus on and adapt to the needs of individual learners. The different elements of the programme may seem mechanical, too general and lacking in depth.

The course description

The course design is captured in the course description. This is an important tool for the trainer or facilitator in preparing the details of course delivery, including duration, methods, materials to be applied, etc. It also provides a good overview for course management and marketing.

Module descriptions are mainly relevant for longer courses which need to be broken down into several subordinate subjects and topics.

The format and detail of course descriptions may vary, but they usually include the following:

- Title, duration, venue, and other basic information
- A descriptive summary of the course
- Profile of the facilitators – (for marketing purposes with names and photos)
- The objective – why the participants need this training, what is expected to be achieved
- Learning outcomes – precise knowledge, skills and attitudes to be acquired.
- Topics of the training course (if large scale can be subdivided under modules)
- The learning methods and activities
- Reference to learning tools and materials
- Profile of the participants and criteria for participation (for instance: must have completed HTC plus 3 years working experience as a teacher)

- Assessment, accreditation and certification (if any).

How to compile and develop learning materials and tools

Learning materials for knowledge acquisition, reflection, exercises and other forms of application during a course is an essential supplement to the course programme and should be given considerable attention during preparation. Such materials may include:

- A compendium of information on the course, selected articles, book passages, quotations, references, and the following (which alternatively may be distributed when relevant and inserted by the participants in the binder)
- Handouts including exercises, cases, questionnaires, tests, etc
- PowerPoint slides printed for the benefit of participants (however, this intrudes with the surprise effect and is not recommended)
- Literature and books.

To save on paper, learning materials, such as academic and professional articles, may be accessed online through links provided to participants.

Trainers and facilitators may use the following tools and equipment during the training sessions:

- Whiteboard
- Flipchart
- Screen
- Projector
- Computers
- Tablets and smartphones
- Laboratory equipment
- Equipment for demonstration
- Note blocks, pens, etc.

The facilitator's preparations

A facilitator or trainer always needs to be well prepared. Often the success of a learning event is directly equivalent to the amount of preparation. When things go wrong participants are likely to develop a negative attitude and the performer may lose his or her confidence and equilibrium. From then on things tend to escalate in the wrong direction. Good preparation provides a safety net to fall back on.

Nevertheless, part of a facilitator's range of skills is also to improvise, adapt to changes, be able to handle unexpected situations, and deal politely but firmly with difficult participants.

Lesson Notes

Lesson Notes are the facilitators own tools for the systematic planning of a learning event. Lesson Notes provide an easy overview, or checklist, of subtopics, details of timing, and for each topic the

methodology, handouts and materials, learning tools, equipment and references.

Lesson Notes may be supplemented by personal notes, which are easy for the facilitator to refer to while running each session without moving the attention away from the participants.

Each facilitator has his or her own style and both Lesson Notes and the facilitator's notes are usually personalised.

Ensuring training goes smoothly

To ensure a training event goes according to plan the facilitator should:

- Go through the programme mentally and try to memorise the broad outline – without overburdening the brain, which may block the mind
- Check projector, computer, tools and equipment the day before or at least in good time before starting
- Ensure back-up technical staff and service staff are easily within reach during the training
- Organise furniture for informality and groupwork
- Have everything arranged and orderly before starting
- Check all external arrangements, such as transport, lunch, registration, etc.

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