Methods for Adult Learning in Groups[1]
Part I

Leaders naturally are concerned with the need to cover content in meetings. Because of this concern, we tend to overuse the lecture method; or we use it in ways that, ultimately, are ineffective for the learning that needs to take place and the new understandings that should emerge. Actually, it is possible to *cover content* through many vehicles. As you read through the various methods outlined in this handout (Part II), consider the variety of ways by which you can lead members of your group to grasp content in addition to the lecture method. Then begin to make specific plans to broaden the ways by which you communicate.

Everything we do to convey content (including lectures or "telling") is a *method* of communication. Our task as leaders is to discern the effectiveness of the methods we habitually use and to select and hone those that work best in various situations, for different groups, and with diverse learning goals. A personal goal for each of us might be to become competent and comfortable with a wide variety of effective methods so that we can select those best suited to the situation at hand.

This handout describes many different ways by which we can involve the members of our groups. Your work will be to discover which methods work best:

  · For the material you wish to convey
  · For the individuals in the group
  · For the physical location
  · For the circumstances of the meeting
  · For the time of day
  · For your own personality and creativity

Broad Categories of Communication Methods

How do we balance: (1) information sharing; (2) interaction with the information; and (3) interaction with one another? We want participants to acquire information, deal with concepts, and confront values, attitudes, or beliefs. The methods we choose should facilitate those desired outcomes.

The methods used in planning team meetings probably will fall into one or more of the following broad categories:

  · <u>Explanation:</u> We use explanations to emphasize, reinforce, review, summarize, clarify, or adapt information to new situations or to other areas of content. Ask yourself: Is Explanation my typical methodology? When/how can explanation be effective? When/how is it likely to be ineffective? How will this method further the development of the people for whom I am taking responsibility?
  · <u>Demonstration:</u> We may choose demonstrations to assist with skill development. Ask yourself: How could I use demonstration effectively the next time I lead a meeting? Would the time it takes me to plan and use this method be worth it in the long-run? How will this method further the development of the people for whom I am taking responsibility?
  · <u>Questioning:</u> Skillful use of questioning can be powerful if our goals are to encourage sharing and participation, assess understanding, or facilitate critical thinking and problem solving. We must be careful in using questioning, however, to create an environment of trust and safety, or participants will tend to freeze up rather than to participate and learn. Ask yourself: Why might I use the vehicle of questioning the next time I lead a meeting? What would be some benefits of using this method with the content that needs to be conveyed? How would I create a *safe* atmosphere in which group participation could take place effectively? How would this method further the development of the people for whom I am responsible?
  · <u>Tutoring:</u> Tutorial methods include a wide range of ways in which leaders may tailor instruction to individuals or smaller, intimate groups. This method is also effective for offering feedback regarding content, reflection, or emotions. Ask yourself: When did I last use the tutorial method in conveying content or eliciting it from an individual or a very small group of people? How would I rate myself on

that attempt? and how/why would I change my format next time? How would the tutorial method further the development of the people for whom I am responsible?

· Inquiry: Through various means of formal or informal inquiry, we can lead people to analyze situations, make decisions, gather information, encourage creativity, and teach one another. Ask yourself: How could the people under my leadership benefit from focused inquiry in given areas? Would the benefits they gained be worth the effort needed to use this method? How easily would it be for me to *let go* of my need to control information flow by encouraging the people under my influence to learn from other *experts* beside myself? How would this method further the development of the people for whom I am responsible?

Methods for Involving Groups
Part 2

Part 1 of this handout outlined broad ways to involve groups in their own learning and understanding. Issues to consider when planning meetings included:

- The material you wish to convey
- The individuals in the group
- The physical location
- The circumstances of the meeting
- The time of day
- Your own personality and creativity

Broad categories of communication methods were also addressed. In thinking about the need to balance information-conveying, interaction with the information, and interaction among the group, several general categories of communication were described, including the following:

- Explanation
- Demonstration
- Questioning
- Tutoring
- Inquiry

Basic questions under each of the categories led us to think about the appropriateness of using one category or another in planning future meetings. Below you will find a lengthy outline of more specific methods. Choose among the methods in planning for meetings, adapting the ideas to suit the needs of the content, the group, and your own personal dynamics. At the end of the list is space for you to envision and add other methods that you have tried or wish to try as you create effective meetings. Please share your own list with colleagues so that all of us will profit.

Specific Methods for Involving Team Members

Many of the methods outlined on the following pages can be used in a variety of situations, and all are just waiting to be tinkered with and adapted as you see fit. Methods can be prepared and used by the leader, or they and be prepared and used by team members. A few suggestions accompany each description. As you consider each method, ask yourself, "Have I tried this method or assigned it to others?" "How often?" "How have we adapted this method effectively?" "How might such a method work optimally in our situation?"

1. Role Play: A short, spontaneous sequence of events and/or conversation. Players are chosen and are given roles to play. The situation frequently is an isolated instance reflecting a conflict or difference of opinion. Role plays can be interrupted to zero in on specific points, to articulate emotions that have arisen, to re-direct a role play that is going awry, etc.
2. Map Work: Individual maps, relief maps, wall maps, floor maps, maps on clear plastic that are hung in the center of the room, maps on blinds puzzle maps, maps tacked to foam or cork (to allow for map pins), maps in sand, maps on overhead transparencies, maps on game boards. Use maps to: play games; locate cities using an atlas—perhaps while discussing a geographical area; to accompany a written or taped travelogue; or as a stage for a historical drama.
3. Historical Round Table: Group members assume the identities of different characters from the same or different periods of time. Together they discuss an issue relating to the situation through the eyes of the characters they are portraying.

4. Time Line: Can be simple or refined as desired. The time line usually depicts a chronological series of events. Divide the time line according to time periods and/or by the events themselves. Pictures or artifacts can be hung or tacked onto the time line as desired.

5. Mobiles: Usually hangs from the ceiling. Construct these to illustrate a series of related facts or themes. Mobiles can work very well as individuals form small groups (each adds a portion), or for small groups to report to larger groups. Visual methods such as mobiles often aid in group bonding.

6. Overhead Transparencies: It requires skill to use this over-used medium well. The same goes for *Power Point*. Be careful not to overuse or to use these mediums as an excuse to lecture.

7. Cassette Tapes: Tape a short lecture and prepare a listening guide to accompany it. Use segments in team meetings or send the tapes and guides to participants to work through as they prepare for a future gathering. You might tape a series of sessions with accompanying work, requesting the participants to listen to the tapes in a given time period. Group members could prepare for meetings or retreats by working through the tapes that present a body of content, with the actual gatherings being saved for deep interaction and deliberation.

8. Murals: Pictures depicting a topic under exploration might be transferred onto appropriate mediums to form murals. Murals often serve well to motivate groups to new attitudes and emotions, or to remind people of events in which they have participated. Murals could also be used to bring two kinds of thinking into a more cohesive whole by combining objects or pictures that normally are not paired together or considered complementary.

9. Creative Writing: Obviously this is a huge area for possible development. Invite team members to imagine and assume roles of others – e.g., persons in the host culture who will be affected by a situation described or planned. Other writing assignments could take on a journal format in response to the subject matter in order to elicit emotions or ideas, or to promote deeper reflection. "Editorials" could be composed. Other creative techniques might include writing poems, songs, or prayers. Or participants could include open journal responses to the subject matter.

10. Case studies: Set up a situation that will require participants to use principles they are learning in order to think "What would happen if. . ."They then discuss their particular study with the larger group or write a report for others to study.

11. Charts: Create charts to depict related information (e.g., genealogies, cause and effect, etc.). Illustrate points in a talk on a chart, or develop an "advance organizer" or an overall outline. Use visual charts to compare information.

12. Research and Report: Individuals are given a problem and resources to use in solving the problem. Allow time at gatherings for groups or individuals to report on new understandings, conclusions, etc.

13. Small groups: Each small group within a larger gathering could be assigned a task or a question. Watch it however: it gets boring very quickly when groups merely are asked to share findings at gatherings. ("Now, group 4, what did you find?" Yawn.) Instead, try asking the whole group to respond to a question or problem that they haven't seen before, but one that requires the insights they gained from their small group work. Small groups can also create great synergy and empowerment when team members suddenly realize, "Ah-HA! Our small group contributed to the larger group, but we also needed what the other groups contributed in order to solve our issue."

14. Panel: Several team members prepare responses and present them in panel format. Others at the gathering may be invited to respond or ask questions. Panels, though frequently overused at conferences, can be great for meetings when individuals have been working in focus groups, or on initiatives in specific locales, or have been gathered into cohorts based on gender, age, ministry assignment, etc.

15. Symposium: Various members of the group are assigned portions of a topic. Each prepares well, then gives a 5-10 minute *lecturette* on their portion. The symposium might be paired with the small-group approach. After the desired number of persons have presented their mini-lectures, divide the large group into smaller units, with prepared questions, to discuss issues from the presentations. Those who gave lecturettes could move from group to group as resource persons. Assigned learning tasks could follow from the symposium approach as well.

16. Seminar: Each member of the group prepares a paper or position on an issue related to the topic under consideration. Papers are presented to all members of the group in advance, then are discussed at the gathering. This approach could work really well for more time-consuming gatherings, such as retreats, family camps, or conferences.

17. Book Reading Talkback: Assign reading from a book or journal. Each time the group meets, an assigned person asks the group to discuss the material they have read in preparation. Probing questions may be asked, or "what if. . . discussions" could be encouraged.

18. Film/Video/DVD Talkback: Show a clip or an entire film that is related to the subject matter under discussion. Prepare questions or an assignment for participant response. The facilitator might stop the presentation part way through and ask the group what is happening, how they believe it will end, etc. Or individuals could view the film, etc. before the gathering in order to give time for quality introspection before a group discussion.

19. Simulation Game: This method is more intensive and involved than role plays (see #1).   For example, if considering "leadership development," you might hypothetically place various individuals in the positions of organizational responsibilities and conduct the meeting as if. . . Pose problems and situations; require participants to plan—all in character. Many types of subject matters will lend themselves to this approach. The facilitator's advance planning will require that they work out the necessary parameters for the situation.

20. Field Trips: What huge possibilities we have with field trips: multi-generational, gender specific or general, fact-finding, with or without preparation, with or without post assignments. Great for a portion of a retreat. It could be a surprise. It could be a reward. It could end with a meal out, or a picnic.

21. Agree/Disagree: Pose a problem or situation. Divide the group into two sides (perhaps facing one another). Each side approaches the problem or situation from a different point of view. Individuals could move back and forth depending on how they vacillate during the discussion.

22. Ball Toss: Divide people into two sides. Ask questions that require little reflection. Toss a nerf ball to someone on the opposite side and ask a question. They answer, then toss the ball to someone else with the same or different question. Always allow people to say "pass" if they are not prepared to answer.

23. Listening Teams: As facilitators prepare lectures, they might prepare questions or content that various individuals are assigned to listen for. After the lecture, a question is posed that will require the individuals to respond to one another.

24. Circle Response: The group is seated in a circle. Describe an issue or event. Go around the circle and request each person to make a statement or to state a position.

25. Neighbor Nudge: Ask team members seated beside one another to comment to each other about a question that has been asked. This is a particularly good method if participants have been slow or hesitant to respond. Invite them to talk with their neighbor about the question. Then return the discussion to the larger group. This approach may stimulate a lagging group discussion, or encourage new thinking that a person-to-person discussion surfaced.

26. Debate: Can be great depending on the dynamics and safety of the group. Individuals may be asked to take the side of an issue to which they may not naturally adhere in order to add interest or possibly to stimulate new understandings. Pairs or teams may debate one another.

27. Brainstorming: Present a problem or a situation. The group brainstorms responses. All responses are written on poster paper or on a white board. Lead the group to make decisions about the most appropriate responses.

28. Can of Worms: Draw out of a can descriptions of thorny issues related to the subject matter under discussion. Team members discuss the issue in relation to principles or insights that have surfaced.

29. Bible Character Interaction: Members of the group assume roles from characters in the Bible. Individuals should research their character in advance and then interact with other characters during the gathering. An interesting variation of this method would be to use the approach during problem-solving. A person could look at the situation from the standpoint of Paul, another from Barnabas' viewpoint, etc.

30. Theory issues and Character Interaction: When dealing with theory issues, try assigning character roles (perhaps a devil's advocate role) in advance. At the   gathering, persons portray those roles without revealing their identities.

31. Model Making: Recreate a whole city from an historical period; or make a model of an artifact. This would be a great multi-generational activity.

32. Storytelling: Instead of lecturing about a historical, or Biblical, or cultural event, or a problem, recreate it in story form.

33. Missions/Bible Lands Fair: Create a Fair complete with maps, food, costumes, music, etc. Various member of the group are assigned various parts.

34. Article for Publication: Request individuals to work in groups of 2-4. Assign topics that could become the substance of an article. The group members work together in research and preparation. Enlist someone to edit their work for publication. Submit the articles to appropriate magazines or journals.

35. <u>Fishbowl</u>: The group listens to 3-5 members of the group discussing an issue, solving a problem, making a decision, reporting on an experience, etc. The group then critiques and/or interacts with the issues that have been presented.
36. <u>Critical Incident</u>: Develop a scenario or issue to a critical point, and then stop. The group suggests solutions.

37. <u>Independent Learning</u>: The following exercises (or adaptations) will help   individuals to practice independent and creative thinking. Assign one of the   following:
   - "Choose an effective way to persuade others about the truth, worth, or value of the material of the issue in question."
   - "Present the information to the group assuming that they have no prior knowledge of the information. Demonstrate a variety of communication techniques."
   - "Research the material and prepare a documentary modeled after better television documentaries."
   - "Invite group members to keep a journal or an 'I wonder about. . .' book. Periodically members can share insights from their journals or seek answers to their questions.
   - "Research the climate, geography, religion, or resources of the _____ region during the _____ period of time. From your findings, propose what this culture group's lifestyle would be, how they would interact with each other, how they would solve issues, etc."
38. <u>Evaluation of Action</u>: A presentation paper conveys content related to a ministry situation. Individuals suggest a response or conviction that has emerged as a result of the performance of a particular ministry task and that pertains to the content of the paper. They analyze the action, evaluate the results, and explain how the content related to their action. The group discusses the significance of the thinking.
39. <u>Learning Games</u>: The content of a gathering is the basis for the design of learning-game questions. Normally it is better to write questions on separate cards. Small groups may be requested to design 1-2 games. The various groups at the gathering can play each other's games. This is a good way to learn factual information related to an issue under discussion. Once the group has played the games, time is spent dealing with some of the issues arising from the content.
40. <u>Five Hats</u>: (adapted from Jerry Ericson). Divide the group into 5 parts, giving them various colors of hats (or tags or bandanas, etc.) The breakdown is as follows: <u>black hats</u> – everything is seen from a pessimistic viewpoint; <u>white hats</u> – everything is judged on basis of legalities or precision; <u>red hats</u> – everything is seen from an emotional viewpoint; <u>yellow hats</u> – everything has a bit of optimistic sunshine to it; <u>Green hats </u>– everything leads to freshness, new growth, or new perspectives. This great method can be adapted in a variety of ways, from fun to serious. Address new dynamics or old issues in order to gain various perspectives.
41-100: YOUR good ideas. . . (Bring your own list and share with us!)