

Components (Activity Units) of Learning-Design Models

A learning-design model is shaped by the arrangement of various types of activity units—the building blocks of educational architecture—in a pattern prescribed by the theme or process of the model. In keeping with the architectural analogy, this approach to the designing of learning is akin to the architectural doctrine that “form follows function.”

The following six types of activity units are available to model designers:

1. *General sessions.* Meetings of all participants as a whole, with a variety of patterns of platform presentation and audience participation as described under “Large Meetings” in Chapter 8.
2. *Small groups* of various sizes and for a variety of purposes, including:
 - Topical discussion groups:* groups organized for the purpose of reacting to, testing the meaning of, or sharing ideas about informational inputs from reading or speakers on given topics;
 - Laboratory groups:* groups organized for the purpose of analyzing group behavior, experimenting with new behavior, and sharing feedback regarding the effects of various behaviors;
 - Special-interest groups:* groups organized according to categories of interests of participants for the purpose of sharing experiences and exploring common concerns;
 - Problem-solving groups:* groups organized to develop solutions to procedural or substantive problems of concern to the total assembly;
 - Planning groups:* groups organized to develop plans for activities within the design or for back-home application;
 - Instructional groups:* groups organized to receive instruction through the services of resource experts in specialized areas of knowledge, understanding, or skill;
 - Inquiry groups:* groups organized to search out information and report their findings to the total assembly;
 - Evaluation groups:* groups organized for the purpose of developing proposals for evaluating the results of the activity for the approval of the total assembly and perhaps executing the approved plans;
 - Skill practice groups:* groups organized for the purpose of practicing specified categories of skills;
 - Consultative groups:* groups organized for the purpose of giving consultative help to one another;
 - Operational groups:* groups organized for the purpose of carrying responsibilities for the operation of the activity, such as room arrangements, refreshments, materials preparation, equipment operation, etc.;
 - Learning-teaching teams:* groups which take responsibility for learning all they can about a content unit and sharing what they have learned with the total assembly;
 - Dyads:* two-person groups organized to share experiences, coach each other, plan strategies, or help each other in any other way;
 - Triads:* three-person groups organized for mutually helpful purposes;
 - Buzz groups:* randomly organized groups of three or four persons that meet in a general assembly to pool problems, ideas, or reactions and report them through a spokesman to the assembly.
3. *Individual consultation, counseling, or directed study:* in which the services of resource persons are made available to individual participants for personalized help.
4. *Reading:* the scheduling of special times (between meetings) for reading handout materials or a selection of references.
5. *Recreation, worship, or meditation:* periods of time set aside for socialization, religious activity, or creative solitude.
6. *Preparatory activity:* things the participants are invited to do before the learning activity starts, such as reading, self-analysis, data collection, etc.