

## CHAPTER 5

# Designs for Conference Sessions, “Lectures,” and Keynote Speeches

I am frequently asked to make short presentations of approximately one hour at conferences, university courses, and organizational meetings. I feel an obligation to be faithful to my andragogical model—that is, to involve the audiences in a process of active inquiry—even in these circumstances, particularly because all of my presentations have to do with some aspect of adult education or human resource development.

Perhaps my most frequent assignment is to give a talk on the future of such entities as education, adult education, higher education, nontraditional education, workplace training, human resource development, and the like. My most common audiences are university faculties, continuing education directors, and chapter members of the American Society for Training and Development at their monthly meetings. Sponsors give these sessions such descriptive labels as “inductive lectures,” “dialogic lectures,” and “participatory sessions”—if they label them at all. More often, they let the learners be surprised. Fortunately, the surprise turns out to be pleasant for most of them.

My typical design for a one-hour session on the future of adult education is as follows.

After being introduced, I repeat the title and point out that professional futurists use two techniques for looking into the future:

- ▶ scenario writing, in which they dream about what they would like the future to be like—say in the year 2020—and write a scenario describing it
- ▶ forecasting, in which they identify current trends and project these into the future.

I explain that I would like to share responsibility with the learners for

peering into the crystal ball at adult education in 2020.

I then ask them to form small groups by turning their chairs so that they face three or four neighbors and brainstorm what they would like to see come into being in adult education in the next few decades. I ask one member of each group to volunteer to be the reporter for his or her group to give a summary of the ideas generated.

I give them 15 minutes to share their dreams. Then I call on the reporters to give their reports. Typically, the reports include such ideas as:

- ◆ Adult education has become the largest segment of the national educational enterprise.
- ◆ More people are participating in adult education programs than in all elementary, secondary, and higher education programs combined.
- ◆ Most adult students are studying at home or at work through computer networks or interactive television.
- ◆ All teachers have been retrained to be mentors or facilitators rather than instructors.
- ◆ College dormitories have become more like motels, serving adult students in one- to five-day workshops and seminars.
- ◆ Didactic courses have been replaced by competency-based, self-directed learning projects, and grades have been replaced by performance assessments.

When at least a representative sample of reports have been completed I say, "I am happy to assure you that most of these dreams are going to come true, as you will see when I pick up on current trends and project them into the future, revealing what it is really going to be like in 2020." I build on the following major trends:

- ◆ The demographic revolution guarantees that we will be dealing with an increasingly aging and diversified population—and therefore with an aging workforce that will need continuous retraining.
- ◆ The accelerating pace of change from the knowledge revolution, the technological revolution, and the information society will require that we provide not only lifelong educational opportunities but training in the skills of personal change.
- ◆ An explosive infusion of research-based knowledge about the nature of learning (particularly adult learning) will require us to shift emphasis in adult education from teaching to self-directed learning.
- ◆ The rapid development of new forms of electronic media for the delivery of educational services and resources will make it possible

for us to make learning experiences available to learners at their convenience in terms of time, place, and pace.

If there is still some time remaining, I open the session to questions and comments.

If the topic is something other than the future—such as improving patient education, lifelong learning, responding to adult developmental and learning needs, improving quality through learning, or a host of other topics—I use an adaptation of this basic design. I open the session by explaining that I wish to demonstrate learning as a process of active inquiry. I then put participants into small groups for a few minutes to generate questions about the topic that they would like me to talk with them about. Then I respond to the questions as they are raised.