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4H Reflection

This course provided me with the opportunity to deliver a program at the 4H National Congress and work with large groups. I was able to design a program and implement it with activities, questions, and debriefing strategies that we learned about throughout the semester. Each of the groups at the 4H were different, but there were some common themes. I believe that activity sequencing and interventions are two things that I need to work on for future facilitations, but I know now that I help others feel comfortable and that I can work through my nervousness!

On the day of the event, there was a great deal of anticipation and I felt incredibly nervous. I tried to channel the nerves into excitement and I believe I had a good response. The students came in smiling, I greeted myself and we waited for everyone to pile in before we began. The first portions of my facilitation for each group were all quite similar: I had to discuss Challenge by Choice, clearly state the expectations for behavior, and we introduced ourselves. Each group at this stage seemed excited, a little nervous and ready to learn. I believe I did particularly well at making everyone seem welcome through maintaining eye contact and smiling. I was surprised at how comfortable I felt once I started my activities. I was expecting to stutter, get red in the face, and go blank at least a few times but I felt very at ease. I attribute this mostly to all the preparation we did throughout the semester, but I believe I am also getting more comfortable working with large groups.

Once we got into icebreakers, this is where the groups differed significantly. For the first half of the day I was using "Rotating Circles," where the participants are standing and talking and moving around. The second half of the day I was using "2 Truths and a Lie," and I had the participants sit down during this activity. I believe that since it was after lunch and since both of my main events and closure also involved sitting, that I should have included more interactive activities. Students in the second half appeared engaged and were responsive towards the beginning of the session, but towards the end I was receiving fewer responses and people seemed tired. Also during the second half of the day, I continuously turned my back to my participants and they had to ask for me to repeat things. I think this was happening because I was having them split into groups before I gave them instructions. In the future, I will think about the sequencing of my activities and facilitator positioning more. I think it will be important that I don't create an entire program using discussion based activities, but instead use a variety of activities that require participants to use different skills sets. I will also try to stay aware of my positioning within my group so I don't have my back to my participants.

For the main activities, each group presented its own set of challenges and successes. For the first and second group of the day, I struggled with my timing and we ended up being done early. I do not believe this had anything to do with group engagement, for the participants appeared interested and were giving thoughtful responses; however, I believe the morning nerves made me move too quickly. For the second group, I went too slowly and dragged things on too long. I would ask the same question twice and receive

similar responses both times. I also caught myself asking multiple yes/no type questions that did not facilitate group discussion.

For the third and fourth group of the day, I had a few participants during the main activities that were very opinionated. I remember they were mentioning controversial topics involving politics, race and sexuality and each time it happened I politely shut it down because I did not feel as though it was appropriate. In retrospect, I believe I could have had a better response to those type of comments. When someone says something controversial, particularly when discussing diversity, it does not have to be shut down. In my head, I was afraid of anyone feeling uncomfortable or someone saying something offensive, but given that I had explained behavioral expectations, I think I could have allowed those participants to explain themselves more.

Given that the entire semester was spent preparing for this event, I felt I was extremely prepared. I am glad that I had had the opportunity to practice my frontloads, debriefs and instructions before implementing them. Rehearsing everything beforehand gave me a sense of comfort once I started my activities. I had very well written notes, and I followed my notes and implemented what I had practiced. However, I noticed that most of my activities did not require a lot of physical movement and therefore were low energy activities. I wish that I had thought more about the participants and their schedule for the day in order to tailor my activities to keep them more engaged. I also feel as though I did not know how to respond when the group did not want to engage at all during a discussion based activity. I believe I need to practice more with interventions and how to frame activities in a way that lays down the expectations for the group more clearly.

The National 4H Congress in conjunction with other programs I've worked this semester have provided me wonderful opportunity to learn new skills and apply what I am learning in class. I am taking away more confidence in working with large groups, and a better sense of how to manage my nerves. Every group I work with teaches me something about myself and the people that I worked with in this class and participants throughout the year have showed me that I am doing something right. Receiving different variations of appreciation from participants and reassurance from classmates has been extremely beneficial for me as a facilitator. I will continue to take construction criticism and evaluate myself, but I will also take time to celebrate my participants and myself for things that need to be celebrated.

Overall, I felt each of the groups at the 4H National Congress had participants that walked away with more than what I was expecting from their comments on the closures. I also walked away with more than what I was expecting from each class. Practicing our programs and working through our metaphors, frontloads and debriefs really did help me create the best program I could. Reflecting on the facilitator I was at the beginning of the course and how I see myself now, I know that I have grown. I feel more confident and aware of things that I need to work on, and I know what I am good at! For next year's class, I would advise them to think about the types of activities they choose, whether discussion based or active, and be intentional about their sequencing throughout the day. I would also recommend they practice interventions and work additional programs to get comfortable speaking in front of groups!