

FACILITATING ENQUIRY-BASED LEARNING: GETTING STARTED WITH THE EPIC MODEL

Dr Paul Tosey, L2L Regional Event, January 2006

What is Facilitation?

'Facilitation literally means "easing" helping learners get in touch with their internal capacities to learn and to make sense of their experiences.' (Gregory 2002 p.81)

Principles of effective practice

Participation in learning is voluntary. Adults engage in learning as a result of their own volition. It may be that the circumstances prompting this learning are external to the learner (job loss, divorce, bereavement), but the decision to learn is the learner's. Thus we can exclude those settings in which adults are coerced, bullied, or intimidated into learning.

Effective practice is characterised by a respect among participants for each others' self worth. Educators must not engage in or seek to cultivate an environment in which behaviours, statements and practices take place that belittle or abuse others. This does not mean that criticism should be absent from educational encounters. It does mean that special attention has to be given to questions of self worth.

Facilitation is collaborative. Facilitators and learners are engaged in a co-operative enterprise in which, at different times and for different purposes, leadership and facilitation roles will be assumed by different group members.

Praxis is placed at the heart of effective facilitation. Learners and facilitators are involved in a continual process of activity, collaborative analysis of activity, further reflection and collaborative analysis and so on.

Facilitation aims to foster in adults a spirit of critical reflection. Through educational encounters, learners come to appreciate that values, beliefs, behaviours and ideologies are culturally transmitted and that they are provisional and relative.

The aim of facilitation is the nurturing of self directed, empowered adults. Such adults will see themselves as proactive, initiating individuals engaged in a continuous re-creation of their personal relationships, work worlds, and social circumstances rather than as reactive individuals, buffeted by uncontrollable forces of circumstance.

Brookfield (1986 pp. 9 - 10)

EPIC: a Simplified Method of Facilitation

This is a four-part method that is distilled from (and of course vastly simplifies) sources such as Brockbank & McGill (1998); Gregory (2002); and Heron (1999).

The pages that follow indicate sources and ideas to help with the first three of these.

1. ENVIRONMENT for enquiry

The facilitator creates a suitable environment for enquiry by managing both the physical and the psychological conditions to create an atmosphere of sufficient safety and trust. It includes checking needs and expectations, and continuing to attend to the emotional and relationship dimension of the learning group. The facilitator upholds 'ground rules', ensures that people have the chance to contribute, and supports and values participants.

2. PRESENCE and attention

The facilitator's presence – their non-verbal behaviour, attention and willingness to disclose their own feelings and experience – is a significant influence on the quality of enquiry.

3. INTERVENING thoughtfully

This is what the facilitator says (and does) to promote enquiry, with emphasis on reflective listening and questioning. Rich questioning encourages reflection on experience, and challenges learners' beliefs and attitudes about the subject, about themselves, and about learning.

4. CHECKING progress

The facilitator attends to the task by planning agendas, managing time boundaries, monitoring progress, checking for relevance, and reviewing whether objectives have been met.

NB these tasks can also be distributed, to a greater or lesser extent, so that learners share responsibility for facilitation.

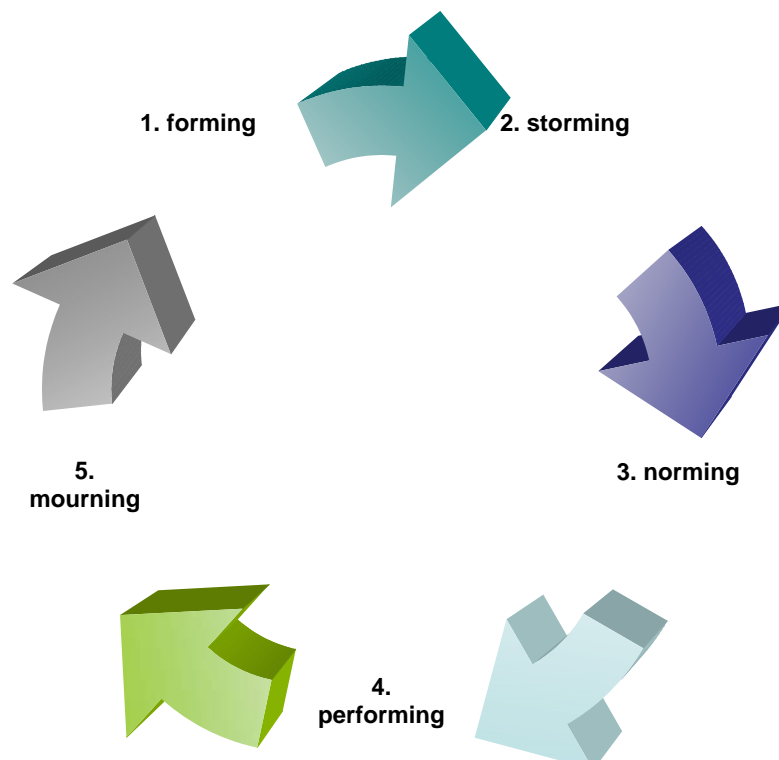
1. ENVIRONMENT for Enquiry

Guidelines for group activity (Brockbank & McGill 1998 p.168)

- Ⓢ Confidentiality
- Ⓢ Equal time to speak
- Ⓢ Listen to others when they speak
- Ⓢ Be honest and open
- Ⓢ Don't attack others
- Ⓢ Give constructive criticism
- Ⓢ No compulsion to speak
- Ⓢ Feelings may be expressed
- Ⓢ Feelings not dismissed
- Ⓢ Awareness/acceptance of diversity
- Ⓢ Observe time boundaries

Group stages (Tuckman & Jensen 1977)

Some awareness of group process and dynamics is helpful for a facilitator (see e.g. Benson 2001). Tuckman and Jensen's model of group stages is well-known. It reminds us that at the start of a group (the 'forming' stage) participants are likely to be anxious, needing to be accepted and feel that they belong. This is why 'ice-breaker' activities can be helpful.



2. PRESENCE and Attention

'The first thing a facilitator brings to a session is her presence. She comes into the room and is instantly present to her students by virtue of her posture, gesture, facial expression and relative position, even before she uses her voice or hearing to communicate.' (Brockbank & McGill 1998 pp. 169 - 70)

Preparing presence

1. Ground and align your body (eg feet on the ground, breathing)
2. Clear your visual focus
3. Extend your kinaesthetic sense beyond your physical body boundary as a connection with others and 'container' for the relationship - as if you can extend the sensors on your skin out into the room.
4. Stay 'in your body' - ie maintain your awareness and witnessing of your own body sensations - vs - going into your own 'head', or becoming absorbed into others' content.

(Paul Tosey 2004, based on work shop with MSc Change Agent Skills & Strategies)

The consequence of unfacilitated enquiry?



'Notice all the computations, theoretical scribbles and lab equipment Norm. Yes, curiosity killed these cats'

3. INTERVENING Thoughtfully: your `Catalytic Converter`

Reflective listening involves paraphrasing and feeding back what a person has said (see Brockbank & McGill 1998 p. 186). Done skilfully it conveys empathy and may encourage the person to clarify or expand on their statement (e.g. `So what you're saying is...'; `If I've understood you correctly, you believe that...'). You can add simple `probes' to follow on from this (e.g. `Tell me more...').

Questioning is a key skill. See for example Heron's `Six Category Intervention Analysis' (Heron 1990, attached).

Another very useful model of questions that support enquiry comes from NLP (Neuro-linguistic Programming). This is known as the **metamodel** (Bandler and Grinder 1975, attached). It is particularly helpful for `unravelling' learners' thought patterns.

Combining these approaches, here are some examples of questions that may be helpful for encouraging enquiry¹; a kind of **Catalytic Converter** for learning. In these, the substantive topic is `enquiry', which you can substitute with your own choice. You can also create further catalytic questions of your own:

- ⓐ What does [enquiry] mean to you?
- ⓐ When you think about [enquiry], what do you see?
- ⓐ What's important to you about [enquiry]?
- ⓐ What's attractive to you about [enquiry]?
- ⓐ What's unattractive to you about [enquiry]?
- ⓐ How does [enquiry] fit into your overall view of [learning and teaching]?
- ⓐ How, specifically, do you [enquire]?
- ⓐ How does [enquiry] differ from [...].?
- ⓐ How will you know that you've learnt to [facilitate enquiry]?
- ⓐ How could you apply your knowledge of [enquiry]?
- ⓐ What does [enquiry] remind you of?
- ⓐ How is your view of [enquiry] different now, compared with [previous time, e.g a year ago]?
- ⓐ What do you really want to achieve through [enquiry]?
- ⓐ What should happen if you use [enquiry]?
- ⓐ What could happen if you use [enquiry]?
- ⓐ What might happen if you use [enquiry]?
- ⓐ What will people be saying about [enquiry] in 100 years' time?
- ⓐ What has changed about you since you became interested in [enquiry]?
- ⓐ What would your students say about [enquiry]?

¹ Based on Dr Jane Mathison's `Questions about Questions', from our current research project on NLP and Transformative Learning

References

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Tuckman, B. W., & Jensen, M. A. C. (1977) 'Stages of small group development revisited', *Group and Organizational Studies* 2, pp 419- 427

Heron's Six Categories of Intervention (Heron, J. 1990 'Helping The Client', London: Sage pp. 5 - 6)

Authoritative	Definition	example
Prescriptive	Seeks to direct the learner's behaviour	'You need to read Heron's book on helping'
Informative	Seeks to impart knowledge, information, meaning to the learner	'Heron's book on facilitation describes six main categories of intervention'
Confronting	Seeks to raise the learner's consciousness about some limiting attitude or behaviour of which they are relatively unaware	'You say you want to read Heron's book, yet you sound very unenthusiastic about the prospect'
Facilitative		
Cathartic	Seeks to enable the learner to express emotion	'What feeling does remembering that group now bring up for you?'
Catalytic	Seeks to elicit self-discovery and problem-solving	'How could you use Heron's model the next time you teach that group?'
Supportive	Seeks to affirm the worth of the learner's person, qualities, attitudes or actions	'You've done really well to manage that group'

Notes:

- ④ 'It is the specific, concrete context that makes one intervention more or less valuable than another'.
- ④ 'Traditional education and training have rather overdone authoritative sorts of intervention, and have often omitted the facilitative sorts altogether'.
- ④ 'Conversely, some innovative contemporary approaches to education... rely too much on facilitative interventions to the exclusion of authoritative ones.'

PATTERN	Description	Examples	response
MODAL OPERATORS (OF NECESSITY AND POSSIBILITY)	Necessity = `must`, `have to`, `should`, etc. Possibility = `can't`, `impossible`, etc.	`Men <u>shouldn't</u> show emotions' `I <u>can't</u> learn this'	What would happen if they did? What stops you?
UNIVERSAL QUANTIFIERS	A broad generalisation: `all`, `always`, `never`, `everyone`, etc.	`My boss <u>always</u> criticises me'	`Always?' `Has there ever been a time when your boss hasn't been critical of you?'
MIND READING	Claiming to know someone else's internal experience.	` <u>People in the group think</u> I'm taking up too much time' ` <u>She is angry with me</u> '	`How do you know they think that?' `How do you know she feels that?'
LOST PERFORMATIVE	A statement or value judgement that leaves out who performed the judgement and how it was made.	` <u>It's indulgent</u> to dwell on your feelings'.	`Indulgent according to whom?' `How do you know that would be indulgent?'
COMPLEX EQUIVALENCE	A = B: an experience is taken as evidence that something else is true.	` <u>George is inarticulate when he speaks in public, so he is a stupid person</u> '.	`How, specifically, does being inarticulate make George a stupid person?' `If you were inarticulate in public, would that make you stupid?'

Table 1: Examples of meta-model patterns