

Facilitation Skills: Working with Adult Learners

Foreword	2
Types of Learning	3
■ What is Adult Learning?	4
Exercise: What is your approach to teaching?	4
Traditional/Pedagogical Model	5
■ Unintended consequences of traditional approaches to teaching	6
Andragogical Model	6
Principles of Adult Learning	8
The Role of the Facilitator	10
■ The six dimensions of facilitation	11
Preparation	12
Group Work	13
Conflict	14
Conflict Resolution	15
Effective Facilitation	16
■ What makes Good Facilitators Great?	17
Bibliography and Websites	18

Written and developed by Rhonda Wynne

September 2002

A D U L T E D U C A T I O N C E N T R E , U C D

FACILITATION SKILLS

Foreword

This booklet is one in a series of publications by the Adult Education Centre, UCD. Each booklet is independent of the others in the series and we hope that you find them a useful reference on a variety of aspects of adult learning.



Over the last two years, the Adult Education Centre successfully applied for funding under the **National Development Plan Training of Trainers** initiative. This funding enabled us to run a series of workshops for both adult education tutors and UCD academic and administrative staff. We invited experts from a variety of institutions, including the Open University and the Learning and Teaching Support Network in the UK, to share their experiences of adult learning, accreditation and programme development. Workshops were run on *Adult Learning Styles*, *Facilitation Skills*, *Assessment for Adult Learners*, and *Course Design and Planning*. The booklets have been developed as a follow-up to these workshops and include notes from the speakers who have presented as well as references to websites and relevant texts in the area.

In time the booklets will be posted on a dedicated tutor support area on the adult education website. All of these initiatives aim to bring the most current thinking on adult education methodologies to our tutors. Further workshops will be run on *Multiple Intelligences*, *Problem Based Learning* and *Learning Journals*. Topics for workshops are determined by tutors and we continue to invite you to submit



ideas for future training sessions.

I hope you find this booklet useful. I would welcome your feedback as this series is intended as a work-in-progress so that we can adapt and add material as new ideas and methodologies gain acceptance.

Rhonda Wynne
Project Manager – Professional Development

Types of Learning

What is learning? How do we define learning? How do we define adult learning?

One of the most useful categorisations is one offered by Saljo in Candy (1991).

- Learning as an increase in knowledge
- Learning as memorising
- Learning as acquisition of knowledge that can be retained and/or utilised in practice
- Learning as the abstraction of meaning
- Learning as an interpretative process, aimed at understanding reality

Dreyfus and Dreyfus (1991) proposed a model which identifies the stages of the learning process:

- **Novice** – A novice does not know anything of the subject he/she is approaching and has to start with taking in the facts and rules of it. The novice cannot decide on which rules to apply and learns them as context-free. Practice is thus limited to imitation, to exercise.
- **Beginner/advanced beginner** – The beginner can start to learn the context of the rules, i.e. that there are different rules to apply in different cases. The practice becomes more varied and more adapted to individual cases.
- **Competence** – At the third stage, the competent person grasps all the relevant rules and facts of the field and is, for the first time, able to bring his/her own judgement to each case. This is the stage of learning that is often characterised by the term “problem solving.”
- **Proficiency/fluency** – The fourth stage is called fluency and is characterised by the progress of the learner from the step-by-step analysis and solving of the situation to the holistic perception of the entirety of the situation.
- **Intuitive expert** – An expert identifies him/herself with the complex real-life situation in which he/she is bound to act. The “art” of the expert consists not

FACILITATION SKILLS

in solving problems, but in constructing them out of the amorphous complexity of life. This act of creating the problem already contains its solution.

Adapted from: www.webcom.com/journal/baumgart.html

What is Adult Learning?

Adult learning is about change – change in attitude, change in knowledge, change in behaviour, change in a skill, change in how we think about things.



The perspectives on adult learning vary according to the context or discipline in which one operates. Many of the policy documents published in recent years, e.g., The EU White Paper *Teaching and Learning: Towards the Learning Society*, take a human capital approach to adult learning with the primary consideration being the development of a skilled workforce. Earlier policy documents from the OECD and UNESCO viewed adult education in terms of personal development and fulfilment and as part of a lifelong process.

Adult learning in the workforce is often viewed as a means of producing more efficient and effective workers. Community groups view adult learning as a transformational process that empowers people to participate fully in society and to live healthier, happier lives. Whatever the context the task of adult education practitioners is to create an environment conducive to adult learning.

Exercise – What is your approach to teaching?

1. What constitutes effective teaching and, specifically, the facilitation of learning among adults?
2. Why should I teach? What is its purpose and value?
3. How does adult learning theory relate to facilitation?
4. How does the way I learn relate to the way I teach?
5. What are effective approaches to presenting information and leading group discussions?
6. How can I improve my skills as a facilitator of adult learning?

Traditional/Pedagogical Model

Many teachers/tutors involved in adult education in Ireland do not have a formal teaching qualification. Tutors may be appointed for their expertise in a subject or discipline, but there is no requirement to hold a teaching qualification for positions in the adult education sector or the further/higher education sectors.

Therefore, teachers/trainers have to learn as they go often copying teaching styles/methodologies from their own experiences of school or college. Unfortunately, this can result in school appropriate teaching practices, which are drawn from the pedagogical model of education, being replicated with adult students.

Five assumptions about learners are inherent in the pedagogical model:

1. **The learner is a dependent personality.** The teacher/trainer is expected to take full responsibility for making the decisions about what is to be learned, how and when it should be learned, and whether it has been learned. The role of the learner is to carry out the teacher's directions passively.
2. **The learner enters into an educational activity with little experience that can be used in the learning process.** The experience of the teacher/trainer is what is important. For that reason a variety of one-way communication strategies are employed, including lectures, textbooks and manuals, and a variety of audio-visual techniques that can transmit information efficiently to the learner.
3. **People are ready to learn when they are told what they have to learn** in order to advance to the next grade level or achieve the next salary grade or job level.
4. **People enter into an educational activity with a subject – centred orientation.** Learning is a process of acquiring prescribed subject matter content in a more or less logical sequence.
5. **People are motivated to learn primarily by external pressures** from parents, teachers/trainers, employers, the consequences of failure, grades, certificates, etc.

FACILITATION SKILLS

Unintended consequences of traditional approaches to teaching

The traditional pedagogical approach to teaching, that of the familiar teacher-as-dispenser-of-knowledge, places responsibility for the learning process primarily on the teacher. The students' resulting passivity and disinterest can discourage inquiry and involvement in learning; teachers can become frustrated at their students' lack of motivation and effort and their expectations of being spoon fed information. Unintended consequences of the teacher-centred classroom include what Beane (1997) identifies as three conditioned learning styles:

1. **the avoidance style**, characterised by the student's lack of participation and, perhaps, irregular attendance;
2. **the dependent style**, characterised by the student seeking security by doing whatever he or she is told; and
3. **the competitive style**, characterised by the student focusing entirely on the end product of grades and viewing other students as competitors.

Adapted from http://www.ed.gov/databases/ERIC_Digests/ed451841.html

Andragogical Model

During the 1960s, European adult educators coined the term "andragogy" to provide a label for a growing body of knowledge and technology in regard to adult learning. The following five assumptions underlie the andragogical model of learning:

1. **The learner is self-directing.** Adult learners want to take responsibility for their own lives, including the planning, implementing, and evaluating of their learning activities.
2. **The learner enters an educational situation with a great deal of experience.** This experience can be a valuable resource to the learner as well as to others. It needs to be valued and used in the learning process.

3. **Adults are ready to learn when they perceive a need to know or do something in order to perform more effectively in some aspect of their lives.** Their readiness to learn may be stimulated by helping them to assess the gaps between where they are now and where they want and need to be.
4. **Adults are motivated to learn after they experience a need in their life situation.** For that reason learning needs to be problem-focused or task-centred. Adults want to apply what they have learned as quickly as possible. Learning activities need to be clearly relevant to the needs of the adult.
5. **Adults are motivated to learn because of internal factors** such as self-esteem, recognition, better quality of life, greater self-confidence or the opportunity to self-actualise. External factors such as pressure from authority figures, salary increases, etc. are less important.



A subscription to either the pedagogical or andragogical model of learning carries with it certain implications for the trainer/manager. The basic concern of people with a pedagogical orientation is *content*. Trainers and managers with a strong pedagogical orientation will be heavily concerned about what needs to be covered in the learning situation; how that content can be organised into manageable units; the most logical sequence for presenting these units; and the most efficient means of transmitting this content. In contrast, the basic concern of those people with an andragogical orientation is *process*. The andragogical process endeavours to create a learner-centred environment.

FACILITATION SKILLS

Principles of Adult Learning

Many writers in the field of adult education have developed guiding principles to assist adult education practitioners facilitate learner-centred education. Following is a composite of some of these principles:

1. Involve adults in program planning and implementation

Including learners in the planning and implementing of their learning activities is considered to be a hallmark of adult education. Their participation can begin with the needs assessment process where group members establish the programme goals and objectives. It is a widely held belief that people will make firm commitments to activities in which they feel they participated and contributed to the planning. Mutual planning of both curriculum, learning objectives, resources, assessment and evaluation methods encourages student participation in, and engagement with, the learning process.

2. Create a physical and social climate of respect

Create a climate that encourages and supports learning. The classroom environment should be characterised by trust and mutual respect among teachers and learners. It should enhance learner self-esteem. Supporting and encouraging learning does not mean that the environment is free of conflict. It does mean that when conflict occurs, it is handled in a way that challenges learners to acquire new perspectives and supports them in their efforts to do so. Adults will generally learn best in an atmosphere that is non-threatening and supportive of experimentation and in which different learning styles are recognised.

3. Encourage collaborative modes of learning

Foster a spirit of collaboration in the learning setting. Collaboration in the adult classroom is frequently founded on the idea that the roles of teachers and learners can be interchangeable. Although teachers have the overall responsibility for leading a learning activity, adult learning is a co-operative enterprise that respects and draws upon the knowledge that each person brings to the learning setting.

4. Include and build on the student's experiences in the learning process

Develop an understanding of learners' experiences and communities.

Draw upon learners' experiences as a resource. Not only do adult learners have experiences that can be used as a foundation for learning new things but also, in adulthood, readiness to learn frequently stems from life tasks and problems. The particular life situations and perspectives that adults bring to the classroom can provide a rich reservoir for learning.

5. Foster critically reflective thinking

Adult learning is facilitated when teaching activities do not demand finalised, correct answers and closure; express a tolerance for uncertainty, inconsistency, and diversity; and promote both question-asking and – answering, problem-finding and problem-solving.

6. Include learning which involves examination of issues and concerns, transforms content into problem situations, and necessitates analysis and development of solutions

Develop and/or use instructional materials that are based on students' lives. An important part of the participatory approach is using instruction that reflects the context of students' lives. Sometimes referred to as contextualised learning, this instruction – and the instructional materials – draw on the actual experiences, developmental

stages, and problems of the learners to integrate academic content with real-life problems. Furthermore, it has the advantage of integrating academic skills; rather than focusing on learning academic subjects separately, promoting learning in ways that are meaningful to the student ensures that the classroom becomes more authentic because adults learn to use skills in real-life situations.



FACILITATION SKILLS

7. Generate a participative environment

Incorporate small groups into learning activities. Groups promote teamwork and encourage co-operation and collaboration among learners. Structured appropriately, they emphasise the importance of learning from peers, and they allow all participants to be involved in discussions and to assume a variety of roles.

8. Encourage self-directed learning

Cultivate self-direction in learners. Self-direction is considered by some to be a characteristic of adulthood but not all adults possess this attribute in equal measure. In addition, if adults have been accustomed to teacher-directed learning environments, they may not display self-directedness in adult learning settings. Adult learning should be structured to nurture the development of self-directed, empowered adults.

Compiled and adapted from::

www.hrdq.com/content/articles/

www.ed.gov/databases/ERIC_Digests/ed451841.html

<http://ericacve.org/docgen.asp?tbl=pab&ID=88>

<http://www.usm.maine.edu/~mbrady/hrd630.html>

<http://www.telusplanet.net/public/tddewar/oned2.html>

The Role of the Facilitator

As facilitator your words, actions, and gestures will all have an impact on the group with which you are working. For example, lack of enthusiasm on the part of the tutor is contagious. Students are sensitive to a tutor's disinterest and disengage. On the other hand enthusiasm and passion for a subject can lift a group, even one that is tired and lacking in motivation. A facilitator needs to be able to read the mood and temperament of a group and decide which activities best match the circumstances. If a facilitator has built up a good rapport with the group, students should feel free to suggest alternative exercises or methodologies, and assuming a consensus is reached, these suggestions can be adopted.

10

There are many aspects to the facilitation process.

The six dimensions of facilitation (Heron, 1999, p.6)

1. **The planning dimension.** This is the goal-oriented, ends and means, aspect of facilitation. It is to do with the aims of the group, and what programme it should undertake to fulfil them. The facilitative question here is: *how shall the group acquire its objectives and its programme?*
2. **The meaning dimension.** This is the cognitive aspect of facilitation. It is to do with participants' understanding of what is going on, with their making sense of experience, and with their reasons for doing things and reacting to things. The facilitative question is: *how shall meaning be given to and found in the experiences and actions of group members?*
3. **The confronting dimension.** This is the challenge aspect of facilitation. It is to do with raising consciousness about the group's resistances to and avoidances of things it needs to face and deal with. The facilitative question is: *how shall the group's consciousness be raised about these matters*
4. **The feeling dimension.** This is the sensitive aspect of facilitation. It is to do with the management of feeling and emotion within the group. The facilitative question is: *how shall the life of feeling and emotion within the group be handled*
5. **The structuring dimension.** This is the formal aspect of facilitation. It is to do with methods of learning, with what sort of form is given to learning within the group, with how is it to be shaped. The facilitative question is: *how can the group's learning be structured*
6. **The valuing dimension.** This is the integrity aspect of facilitation. It is to do with creating a supportive climate which honours and celebrates the personhood of group members; a climate in which they can be genuine, empowered, disclosing their reality as it is, keeping in touch with their true needs and interests.. The facilitative question is: *how can such a climate of personal value, integrity and respect be created*

FACILITATION SKILLS

Preparation

- Exhaustive preparation is key!! (The more prepared you are the easier and more effective your job is). *Fail to prepare. Prepare to fail.*
- When you select activities, know why you are doing them. What do you hope to accomplish?
- Make sure your logistics (props, materials, etc.) are all in order
- Prepare a teaching folder/box containing your materials, flip chart pens, paper, etc., whatever you need to run an effective class
- Set the room up in a format that includes all students, e.g., circular seating
- Is there room for break out groups?
- Plan appropriate alternatives for when things don't go as planned
- Have material in a variety of formats so as to accommodate different learning styles



- Don't rely overly on overheads or PowerPoint presentations – only key points should be presented rather than text laden slides
- Run through the process in your mind: Visualisation – picture yourself leading your group – What do you see?
- What is the ideal? Is what you want to see happening what is really happening?
- Have you extra exercises/discussion topics in case the group works very quickly?
- **Logistical considerations:** Are you familiar with the catering arrangements so that you can arrange breaks, etc?
- **Establish your credibility.** E.g., don't undermine your position by apologising for your lack of familiarity with new technology, etc. Work with what you have.
- **Time-keeping.** Be punctual and endeavour to finish on time. Poor time management leaves a poor impression.

Group Work

Having prepared for your course, the next key consideration is how you might generate a good working dynamic with your students. The first meeting can be crucial as it sets the scene for the remainder of the course. It is important to spend some time getting to know the group and working out their expectations. Groups go through various stages in their development:

Forming – formalities are preserved and members are treated as strangers.

Storming – members start to communicate their feelings but probably still view themselves a little outside rather than part of the team. They attack others insular attitudes while guarding their own.

Norming – people feel part of the team and realise that they can achieve work if they accept other viewpoints.

Performing – the team works in an open and trusting atmosphere where flexibility is the key and hierarchy is of little importance.

As you work with groups you will be able to identify how well the group is gelling. Who is leading? Who is excluded? Why? How can this be dealt with? Is there a difficult group member? How is he/she being difficult? Can you deal with this person or how can you involve the group members in taking control of the situation?



FACILITATION SKILLS

Conflict

Conflicts in class can be very disruptive, but they can also be helpful. If the person who is disagreeing with you, or with another group member, is raising valid questions, it may benefit the group to address the issues they are presenting. In fact, by listening to them, you may gain valuable insight into what is and what is not working in class, or where there is lack of understanding or difficulty with the course material. Conflict which is unmanaged can disrupt a group dynamic and undermine motivation and commitment.

Conflict indicators:

- Body language
- Disagreements, regardless of issue
- Strong public statements
- Conflicts in value system
- Desire for power
- Increasing lack of respect
- Open disagreement
- Lack of clear goals



Conflict is destructive when it:

- Takes attention away from other important activities
- Undermines morale or self-concept
- Polarises people and groups, reducing co-operation
- Increases or sharpens difference

Conflict is constructive when it:

- Results in clarification of important problems and issues
- Results in solutions to problems
- Involves people in resolving issues important to them
- Causes authentic communication

- Helps release emotion, anxiety, and stress
- Builds co-operation among people through learning more about each other and the subject matter
- Helps individuals develop understanding and skills

Conflict Resolution

If a classroom disagreement moves on to the point of disruptiveness, specific steps should be taken. Below is a list of conflict resolution tactics that you can use when you feel a situation is getting out of control.

- Find some “grain of truth” in both sides of the argument.
- Identify areas of agreement in the two positions.
- Avoid arguing over individual ranking or position. Present a position as logically as possible.
- Avoid “win-lose” statements. Discard the notion that someone must win.
- Avoid changing of minds only in order to avoid conflict and to achieve harmony.
- Document the subject and set it aside to discuss at the next meeting.
- Ask to speak with the individual(s) after the meeting or during a break.
- See if someone else in the group has a response or recommendation.
- Avoid majority voting, averaging, bargaining, or coin flipping. These do not lead to consensus.
- Treat differences of opinion as indicative of incomplete sharing of relevant information, keep asking questions.
- Keep the attitude that holding different views is both natural and healthy to a group.
- View initial agreement as suspect. Explore the reasons underlying apparent agreement and make sure that members have willingly agreed. Agree that the

FACILITATION SKILLS

person has a valid point and there may be some way to make the situation work for both parties.

- Present your view, but do not force agreement. Let things be and go on to the next topic.
- Create a compromise.

Effective Facilitation

Effective facilitation requires:

- Fulfilling the role of guide, not leader
- Establishing boundaries /rules for class behaviour, conflict, etc.
- Cultivating atmosphere of respect
- Understanding personal learning styles and adult learning principles
- Understanding group dynamics



- Building group confidence
- Guiding and managing group interaction
- Understanding diversity/cultural differences
- Organising content, designing structured activities and processes
- Active listening, paraphrasing, observing, clarifying and elaborating
- Interpreting verbal and non-verbal behaviour
- Confronting dissension and managing differences, conflict resolution
- Collaborating with others; promoting participation/ inclusion
- Analysing accurately and rapidly
- Organising, summarising and connecting data

- Thinking and speaking clearly
- Keeping focused on the process and achieving its desired outcomes
- Giving and receiving feedback
- Utilising questioning strategies and range of activities – quizzes, role plays, etc.
- Incorporating evaluation mechanisms
- Maintaining a good sense of humour – creating a light hearted atmosphere

What Makes Good Facilitators Great?

Beyond polished skills, certain personal traits separate a competent facilitator from an inspired one. Inspired and inspiring facilitators:

1. Inspire *confidence and trust*
2. Relinquish *control* of the results
3. Super-charge the room with their *energy and passion for the process*
4. Are infectious in their *enthusiasm*
5. Are eminently *adaptable*
6. Ditto *fair*
7. Win others over with their *authenticity*
8. Ditto *humility*
9. Are *protectors* of each and every idea until evaluation time
10. Are *outcome-driven* yet *detached* from the results

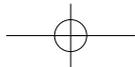
Taken from <http://www.planonline.org/planning/strategic/overview.htm>

FACILITATION SKILLS

Bibliography and Websites

- Brookfield, S.D. (1986) *Understanding and Facilitating Adult Learning*. San Francisco: Jossey Bass
- Daines, C. & J., Graham, B. (1993) *Adult Learning Adult Teaching*. University of Nottingham, Department of Adult Education.
- Heron, J. (1999) *The Complete Facilitators Handbook*. London: Kogan Page
- Lawler, P.A. (1991). *The challenges of the future: Ethical issues in a changing student population*. Philadelphia, PA: Research for Better Schools. (ED 340 305)
- Lawlor, M. and Handley, P. (1996) *The Creative Trainer: Holistic Facilitation Skills for Accelerated Learning*. Berkshire: McGraw Hill.
- Tuckman, B. (1965) *Developmental Sequence in Small Groups*. Psychological Bulletin, 63, 384-399.
- Tuckman, B. & Jensen, M. (1977) *Stages of Small Group Development*. *Group and Organisational Studies*, 2, 419-427.
- <http://ericacve.org/docgen.asp?tbl=pab&ID=88>
- <http://www.nl.edu/ace/Resources/Documents/AdultLearning.html>
- <http://www.telusplanet.net/public/tddewar/oned2.html>
- <http://www.rcc.ryerson.ca/learnontario/idnm/mod2/mod2-2/mod2-29.htm>
- http://www.ed.gov/databases/ERIC_Digests/ed451841.html
- <http://www.hrdq.com/content/articles/>
- <http://www.usm.maine.edu/~mbrady/hrd630.html>
- <http://www.webcom.com/journal/baumgart.html>
- <http://dspace.dial.pipex.com/town/estate/dd75/teamwork/tsld005.htm>
- http://www.mapnp.org/library/grp_skill/theory/theory.htm
- <http://www.planonline.org/planning/strategic/overview.htm>

NOTES



NOTES

