

## CHAPTER 3

## Facilitation Practices for Inclusive Teaching

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Some educators see facilitation as a *good day, bad day* thing. They intuitively deploy a lot of interpersonal skills that have been honed over time, resulting in an effective class, workshop, or meeting. This approach works up to a point. These good teachers might have a lot of days where it just feels right. Sometimes, the conditions don't line up perfectly, and then they have a bad day. Recognizing what we do to facilitate learning well and how we do it limits bad days, and makes good days better and more consistent. We see facilitating learning as the process of making learning accessible and achievable for our diverse community of learners across multiple modalities and contexts.

Facilitation is dynamic, contextually bound, and implemented in partnership with a community of learners. When done well, it

recognizes and attends to diversity, equity, and inclusion. In this chapter, we endeavor to explore how that can be done. Specifically, we will address the ways in which: 1) relationships are foundational and always nuanced by sociocultural contexts, 2) recognizing learners as whole persons and developing inclusive curriculum produce better learning, and 3) learner capability and capacity can be enhanced.

In our career as practitioner educators, we have relied on facilitation skills to enable learning as teachers working with students, as trainers working with professionals, as crisis responders working with the community, as advisors working with groups, as colleagues working with committees, and as human beings living in community. While Leslie primarily works in student affairs and Chris primarily works as faculty, both teach courses, facilitate workshops, train professionals, and lead in a variety of capacities. We use facilitation skills across these areas to make learning accessible and achievable.

We'll share some facilitation narratives that cross multiple contexts: professional development, workshops for students, classroom discussions, and emotionally charged moments. While exploring multiple contexts provides insight into how the nuances of those contexts shape learning experiences, the foundational facilitation skills used to navigate those moments and enable learning are the same across contexts and modalities. Even though some of our examples required delicate navigation, the skills that help us navigate those moments are equally productive in our routine day to day facilitation practices whether those be in the classroom, in a workshop, or in a meeting. Let's see if we can make our good facilitation days better and more consistent.

## RELATIONAL CONNECTION AND SOCIOCULTURAL CONTEXT

Our job as facilitators is not to never fail, but to recognize when we are failing and adapt our strategies. In its perfect form, we do this in real time, not the next day. The following scenario was far from perfect, but along with the other examples in this chapter, it does offer a few lessons on relational connection, recognition, and learner capacity and capability. If we learn to effectively use facilitation techniques, plan out a few different pathways for progression, and make ourselves prepared to adapt our approaches, maybe we can catch a closer glimpse of that perfect form.

### *FACILITATION FAILURE*

**Chris** — Walking down a scenic mountain road in early fall was both peaceful and invigorating. I was heading toward University of Colorado Boulder's campus to facilitate a three-hour workshop on combatting hate on college campuses. Pre-conference workshops were intended to be intensive engagements for small audiences. In this case, thirteen participants registered to attend mine. A key factor to effectively facilitating longer engagements is extensive preparation—I had been prepping for several months and felt ready to go. On the day of the event, the conference coordinators learned that CU Boulder had just experienced a major hate crime, so they opened the workshop up to all CU Boulder personnel for free, elevating the attendance to nearly thirty participants, a still workable size but different than anticipated. Folks entered the room, and the energy was palpable. They were serious professionals interested in serious action, which got us past the first hurdle facilitators usually need to overcome. We

spent some time introducing ourselves and what brought us to a workshop focused on responding to hateful violence.

Then we dove deep. I guided participants through a comprehensive evaluation of their campuses' prevention, intervention, and response strategies. I frequently use this assessment approach to identify potential areas for improvement. The first sign there was a problem with how the workshop was going was in participant body language. Some began to slump. Others shifted in their chairs with irritation. Vocal tones became terse. Their language quickly shifted from identifying challenges to expressing frustrations about how they were underappreciated, under-supported, and undervalued. Just like that, the workshop was under water, and I was struggling to stay afloat. The next few hours did not go well.

Later that night, I called some colleagues and talked through my epic failure. The extensive preparation I did turned out to be woefully insufficient. I hadn't considered how my preparation and needed adaptation should have been informed by the contextual dynamics impacting individuals, groups, and structures. These folks were working through a recent hate crime and all the challenges that that brings. As individuals and programs, they were justifiably feeling overtaxed and unsupported. No doubt some of the participants were impacted more profoundly by the recent violence: those from the CU Boulder campus experiencing emotional and physical fall out from the event, those who themselves occupied marginalized locations, and others still with indirect or unseen echoes of violence from past experiences. Hate crimes dehumanize not just individuals but also related population groups. Further, each institution has its own set of long-held barriers (practices, policies, resources) that thwart change. Under such circumstances, my choice to begin the workshop

by identifying ways they needed to work harder and better had been short-sighted.

The next day, I facilitated the workshop again with a group likely to have similar needs. I kept much of the content the same, but engaged it very differently. I opened with a collaborative discussion of the local challenges folks were facing, what they were accomplishing in their areas, and how we could build networks of support on our campuses to meet our challenges. Then we dove deep, critiquing our strategies. I paid closer attention to where participants were, not just with their interest in the problem, but also their relational connection to it and their capacity for challenge. As we moved forward in the workshop, I was prepared to adapt as failures emerged. Having been more recognized and supported this time, participants embraced the material, and the overall experience was much more productive for them and for me.

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Relational connections are foundational for facilitation, and as we have seen in the example provided, context and culture always shape and nuance those connections. Learners are balancing multiple relational connections at any given moment, not the least of which are their connections with the material, other learners, and the facilitator. Facilitators work to support learners in these connections by meeting known learner needs of relative importance, self-efficacy, and safety (Baddeley 2001; Hammond 2015; Sousa 2001; Stanovich 2003). Primarily, we do this with two broad strategies: first, recognizing learners as whole persons in sociocultural contexts, and second, inclusive curriculum (Ladson-Billings 1995, 2014; Hammond 2015; Gay 2010; Flintoft and Bollinger 2016).

### RECOGNIZING LEARNERS

While our own knowledge, skills, and accomplishments are important contributions, learners are neither deficits needing to be made whole nor passive recipients of our expertise. Good facilitators recognize learners as whole persons in sociocultural contexts (Ladson-Billings 1995, 2014; Hammond 2015; Gay 2010; Flintoft and Bollinger 2016). Consider the sociocultural context in the narrative and the framing with which Chris entered the workshop. He viewed the engagement problem clinically, as a challenge separate and decontextualized from history and the learning community. In so doing, he dismissed the learners from the picture. He missed understanding the learners as assets to solving the problem in two important ways. First, participants' nuanced understandings of the impact of the crime help us understand which issues need to be prioritized and how we might best address those issues. Second, participants' previous success experiences help us to develop support networks to sustain responses.

On the first pass, Chris failed to recognize how participant experiences fully shaped the moment. In so doing, he placed the learners in the role of passive targets who failed to prevent the violence from happening. In the revised workshop, he recognized the participants more holistically as he worked with them to capitalize on their assets, highlight previous accomplishments, and reinforce support networks. After which, the group was in a much better position to collaboratively tackle some of the systemic and local challenges. In this version, he cast learners in the role of assets rather than deficits, simultaneously accomplishing two things. First, participants were able to share and learn about their contributions and strengths. Second, participants were able to

develop a better, more sustainable, response. For more information on asset based pedagogy, see López (2017).

#### *CURRICULUM INTEGRATION*

The goals of curriculum integration are twofold: show learners the importance of the topic as it relates to their unique lives and experiences and support learners in recognizing their personal capability in becoming competent and accomplished in the topic area. The primary mechanism for meeting these goals is designing a curriculum that more inclusively represents the diversity of the learning community through both content and modality (Ladson-Billings 1995, 2014; Hammond 2015; Gay 2010). Some of this work can happen before facilitation of learning begins. One might consider the texts through which learners recognize themselves in and connect with course content: books, scholarship, websites, author/practitioner examples, case studies or problems worked, media shown, music heard, and/or perspectives shared.

Research indicates that culturally relevant curricula have substantial benefits. Sleeter (2011) and Fischer (2007) have shown that students of color participating in such curricula exhibit higher levels of academic engagement and achievement (Brozo, Valerio, and Salazar 1996). By connecting their learning to their cultural contexts, students are more likely to feel empowered (Carter 2008; Vasquez 2005) and motivated to succeed academically.

In addition to the content we learn, curriculum integration also considers how we learn the material. Indeed, some scholars have suggested that learners from different cultural groups lean more toward certain kinds of learning interaction with familiar cultural activities (Ladson-Billings 1995, 2014; Hammond 2015;

Gay 2010). These have revolved around type, genre, and style of activities. Consider learners doing small group work (type) analyzing songs as a means of understanding social messaging (genre). One might build the exercise to focus on country music, pop, or hip hop (style). Different learners might have more familiarity with some types, genres, or styles over others, and that familiarity can allow for quicker processing, making other learning easier. That said, there is a significant risk in assuming that all members of a particular cultural group favor the same type, genre, or style (Paris 2012). As facilitators, we want to provide students opportunities via assignments and modalities to approach learning in multiple ways. We also want to watch how these engagements work in real time and adapt as we go. To do that, we need a big toolbox.

When many of us think about “multiple modalities,” we often think about issues of the interface, whether we are face to face, online, or in virtual reality. Certainly, these are relevant, but we like to think about modalities in a less limited way. We are accustomed to learning as individuals, in pairs, small groups, and large groups. We process things internally and externally. We appreciate audio, visual, and kinesthetic stimulation. We produce material in a variety of formats, some of which are written works, presentation, media, and art. Effective facilitators are prepared to traverse multiple modalities, dialing in when those are working and shifting to alternatives when change is needed.

In addition to making course content relevant to students’ lives and supporting self-efficacy for learners by providing multiple entry points for different learners to access the material, curriculum integration has a broader benefit for all of us. In her TED Talk entitled “The Danger of a Single Story,” celebrated author Dr. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie reminds us in the absence

of multiple true stories how easy it is for any of us to develop reductive stereotypes about our fellow community members. As educators, we need to be cautious of being overly reductive with our course design and facilitation. There is more than one true story of how learning can be achieved. Facilitating inclusive curriculum through which multiple truths are shared and multiple modes of learning can be engaged provides participants with greater accessibility to learning.

We have focused on recognizing learners as whole persons in sociocultural contexts and curriculum integration as broad structural facilitation choices. We'll focus more on recognizing and valuing learners in greater depth later in this chapter. For now, though, we would like to consider the roles of capacity and capability.

### **ENHANCING CAPACITY AND CAPABILITY (FOR LEARNERS AND FACILITATORS)**

Our sense of safety is influenced by actual and perceived threats to our physical well-being and our social status (Hammond 2015). With threats to both physical well-being and social status, there is a risk that the amygdala, a part of our brain, floods our system with cortisol inducing “fight or flight.” When coping with trauma, anxiety, stress, and depression, learners potentially contend with these types of chemical alterations in their body, which consequently challenge their learning. While the nuances of each of these factors are better addressed by mental health care professionals, facilitators still need to recognize when learners are contending with such challenges and offer them general support including but not limited to but not limited to sharing campus/local mental health resources available to students or participants.

Fortunately, there is much that we can do as facilitators to create a supportive learning environment that does not require us to be mental health care professionals. See [chapter 1](#) for more on cognitive and neural influences on learning.

### *FACILITATION CHALLENGE*

**Leslie** — Early in my role as Advocacy Coordinator at Texas Lutheran, I facilitated a workshop with students on healthy and unhealthy relationships. I showed a 20–30-minute film that depicted a couple whose relationship escalated to abuse, emotionally and physically. Following the film, a student shared that it reminded her so much of a past relationship. I could see it on her face. If I close my eyes, I can still see her face. I see her connecting the dots. I hear it in her voice as her heart breaks, and she begins to conceptualize for the first time that she has experienced something very traumatic. Finally, she says it aloud in front of everyone, “Oh wow, I did not realize I was in an abusive relationship until now. I did not know that is what it is called.” At that moment, I suddenly became overwhelmed with emotion.

I felt honored that she felt like she could share something so personal and difficult with me. I felt happy because she could put words to what happened to her. Honesty and language to express oneself are powerful for a person’s journey and healing. Yet, I also felt incredibly sad. Seeing her realization was like looking in a mirror for me. She is also a Latina with long brown hair and brown skin. She was about the same age I was when I was coping with an abusive relationship. Wholly drawn in, I was once again a teenager going through it for the first time with her. Then I felt scared as I realized that the things I say and do next are impactful

and they matter. I am not just reading about these issues anymore. I am talking to people with real experiences and real feelings.

At this point, she needed my attention, and the class needed to move forward, so I had to rethink my original facilitation strategy quickly. I knew I needed to create a space to breathe, collect my thoughts, and be fully present to the students. So, I acknowledged the student's experience and reassured her that she was not alone. Then, I redirected the conversation to a group activity. I let the students get into three small groups, one group of all men, one of all women, and one of men and women. I gave them a scenario to read and discuss how they would respond. While the students talked in groups, I got myself together, checked in with the student without drawing additional attention to her, and determined how to move the group forward. In time, we wrapped up the session.

I think about this student a lot while I facilitate workshops now. Her face is etched in my memory—a constant reminder of the power of connection, empathy, and the importance of doing this work to the best of my ability.

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When facilitating challenging material, we consider not only the challenges faced and care needed by our learners but also by ourselves. The moment described in the narrative above was not only potentially triggering for the learner but also for Leslie. When triggered, some feel stripped of control and isolated from support networks. This limits our capacity, meaning the amount and type of challenge we have room to cope with, and our capability, meaning our ability to engage and complete tasks. In this section, we will discuss approaches to help us navigate

these difficult moments. The first challenge we always face is realizing and accepting what is taking place. Doing so allows us to create opportunities to enhance our capacity and capability. Once we have accepted what is taking place, we can focus on restoring control, understanding and shaping beliefs, and rebuilding a communal support network.

#### ACCEPTANCE

Just breathe. We have all heard this before, and it is sage advice. When your heart is racing and you are starting to have tunnel vision, just breathing is harder than it sounds. First, you need to recognize that you and/or others are having a reaction like this. Your heart rate picks up. You find it difficult to track things beyond what is right in front of you. Your breathing feels a little more labored. In the narrative, Leslie detected the shift in her own experience and in her students. She heard the strain in the student's voice and saw the struggle on her face. Sometimes, people show other signs of internal struggle like twitching or rubbing their hands together. When we see these things, we need to check in on folks and provide support. Prior to that, though, we need to make space where we can do this. Leslie made space by first accepting the feelings she was having and identifying what prompted them. Next, she shifted the exercise modality and decreased the required capacity. She moved from a large group discussion on an emotionally deep topic to small group discussions on a less threatening question. Then, she was in a much better position to collect herself, check in with her student, and provide support.

In the event of an anxiety attack, one cannot control their way out of it; trying to do so, ironically, increases the anxiety.

Conventional reasoning is to accept what you are feeling, identify what is causing it, and ride it out. Challenges of an anxiety attack acknowledged, focusing on our breathing can help reduce stress. One approach is to slow your breathing, taking deep breaths in and out, which can help to slow your heart rate. Another technique is called box breathing. You breathe in for four counts, hold for four counts, out for four counts, hold for four counts, and repeat a few times. Sometimes these approaches help us regain physiological control. Focusing on our breathing also allows us to clear our distractions, at least for a moment, which can allow us to better prioritize our next steps.

As facilitators, we also want to focus on how learners perceive themselves as having control of what and how they are learning. Our perception of control can be influenced by our choices, our beliefs about learning, and our community of learning. As facilitators we can help to shape all three of those influences.

#### *CONSTRUCTED CHOICES*

When we make choices, it adds to our feeling of control in an experience. As the facilitator, you can provide choices that are very simple or very complex. You would determine the kinds of choices by considering what you believe the learner capacity is in a moment and what your concerns are regarding potential risks. In the previous example, consider the facilitator's decision to shift the exercise. The student disclosing her personal experience was potentially in an increasingly vulnerable position. In some disclosure cases, the momentum runs faster than the learner is prepared for and presses decisions before they are ready to make them. This can result in high vulnerability under heavy scrutiny. The facilitator wanted to give the student room to express herself

when she was ready. To do that in a way that relieved the pressure but also did not shut her down, the facilitator shifted the exercise to the small groups (less scrutiny) and shifted to a less risky question for discussion. She also connected with the learner at the next opportunity to check in. So, the learner could connect more with her, share more with the group, or not discuss it any further until she was ready, but in any of those renditions, the learner had a moment to think through what she needed and wanted.

#### *UNDERSTANDING AND SHAPING BELIEFS*

Our self-efficacy, our belief in our capability of performing a task, is a key factor in our ability to learn how to do a task. As a result, the mindset with which we enter an engagement is important. Carol Dweck (2006) addresses the relationship between mindset, growth or fixed, and the identification and achievement of goals. Believing you are either capable or not capable of something (a trait you either have or do not) is considered a fixed mindset. Believing you may not presently be able to do something but can improve and eventually become capable (a changing state) is considered a growth mindset. Dweck associates learning potential more with a growth mindset. People might have fixed mindsets about some things and growth mindsets about others. The language we use (about ourselves or others) helps to shape our mindset. For example, people will often say something like, "I am not a good writer" or "I am not good at math," both of which indicate fixed mindset thinking. Dweck suggests that shifting the language to "I am not a good writer yet" refocuses our expectation on how they can improve and become good rather than accepting the state that they are not capable. Similarly, we want to identify and reinforce movement and growth when that

happens. Move the emphasis from the specific state, “you are good at this,” to the growth process, “your efforts have been paying off, this is great work.”

#### *REBUILDING A COMMUNAL SUPPORT NETWORK*

Our beliefs about learning extend beyond our viewpoints of the ways we learn but also about the safety of the spaces in which we learn. The rhetoric on safe spaces is highly contested, in large part due to the two issues (Arao and Clemens 2013). First, we cannot make or guarantee that any of our spaces will always be safe for all our students. Second, sometimes students perceive uncomfortable spaces of learning as unsafe. Arao and Clemens (2013) argue for rethinking our spaces as “brave spaces.” They assert that we should do more to prepare our learners for nonviolent but sometimes discomfiting spaces of learning.

So how do we develop learning communities that feel like brave spaces? In our effort to bring about brave spaces, we work to develop a learning community with a shared sense of honesty and respect. To do this as a facilitator, work with the group to develop a shared understanding of the kinds of things you will be engaging, ground rules for how participants will engage them, and define what acting respectfully towards each other means. Facilitators will often recognize the challenges that may arise in the engagement and discuss how they will work through difficult moments. Expectations of privacy are a common discussion point. Finally, the facilitator and participants should spend some time learning about each other and each other’s hopes and goals. In singular events, this tends to be more directed by the facilitator, and in longer engagements over time (a course, for example), facilitators tend to do this more collaboratively with the group.

Arao and Clemens (2013) interrogate popular community interaction ground rules for so called safe spaces, including “agree to disagree,” “don’t take things personally,” “challenge by choice,” “respect,” and “no attacks” (143). Rather than “agree to disagree” which they believe truncates discussions about difference, they suggest “controversy with civility” (144). This acknowledges and encourages purposeful and civil discussion regarding contention. Similarly, they dispute not taking things personally as things often do impact people personally. Instead, they suggest focusing on “owning your intention and your impact” (145). While they find “challenge by choice,” “respect,” and “no attacks” helpful, they argue for a deeper understanding of each: understanding why we might be uncomfortable with challenge, discussing what respect means for us in which contexts, and differentiating between problematic attacks on people and productive challenges to ideas.

Many facilitators provide trigger warnings for material that potentially poses greater risks. While equipping students with the knowledge of content areas prior to engagement does support their control of how they engage the material in positively productive ways, it is insufficient in preventing post-trauma responses and does not on its own necessitate effective pedagogy. Flintoft and Bollinger (2016) suggest the following strategies for enhancing pedagogy that goes beyond trigger warnings: “Structuring learning through gradually increasing levels of intensity” (29), using “multiple modes of delivery” (30), “collaborating proactively with students known to have post-trauma experiences,” and “responding appropriately when students experience a trigger response.” By scaffolding with increasing intensity, assignment structures allow for multiple facilitator evaluation and intervention points, thus creating opportunities to respond to students or pivot direction before situations escalate too high.

As discussed earlier, having multiple modalities prepared not only adds entry points for students with different learning needs, it also provides more maneuverability. In many cases, we know in advance some potential hot points for some students. We can collaboratively work with them and, when appropriate, with mental health care professionals to determine better learning approaches. Once trigger points are known, they are easier to navigate. Finally, while we are not counselors, as facilitators we can be good listeners and make referrals to mental health care professionals. We can certainly adapt our facilitation to situate our learners in less vulnerable moments without sacrificing their or others' education, as was demonstrated in the narrative.

Modeling and self-disclosure is another technique that lessens the sense of risk for learners, but it also presents a different set of risks (Jacobs et al. 2015). Modeling involves demonstrating how to do something. After seeing it done, learners often find trying it less risky as it is more of a known concept. Self-disclosure involves the facilitator sharing their own experience. This approach allows the group to see the leader taking a risk, which often encourages them to reciprocate. If you exceed the comfort capacity of the learner when sharing your experience, they may disengage, and you are left in a heavily vulnerable position. But when engaged effectively, it engenders a lot of trust—so much so that the facilitator needs to be careful about the momentum we were discussing in the earlier section. In some cases, the momentum runs across the group with graduating levels of disclosure, potentially encouraging some folks to share more than they are ready to share and later wishing they could un-share it. So, if you use this tool, it is important to also be attentive to the vulnerability levels of your learners and be prepared to deescalate the momentum by shifting an exercise or altering the tone. We will

discuss this in more detail in the section on personalizing and depersonalizing.

Ruiz-Mesa and Hunter (2019) suggest modeling “disagreement with ideas, not people” (136). When discussing different perspectives on ideas, instructors can prompt students to consider the origins of their attitudes toward difficult issues. The facilitator can suggest various scenarios or contexts in which a particular viewpoint might have developed, encourage students to question why certain beliefs are strongly held by some individuals or communities. This reflection can lead to respectful discussions that acknowledge the diverse ways people perceive controversial topics, bridging differences among students whose attitudes, values, and opinions vary widely. This approach promotes relationship maintenance during disagreement and establishes a norm where participants are urged to reflect on their biases and privileges, as well as consider the validity of their classmates' opposing viewpoints.

### **FACILITATOR SELF-CARE**

Facilitation as a practice is, in and of itself, hard work. Staying present and responsive to the needs of participants while also monitoring your own energy level and emotional state and maintaining focus on the engagement and lessons to be learned is emotionally taxing, even when you do it well. This is potentially even more challenging for work with heavier emotional content such as violence, issues that have serious impact on historically excluded or underrepresented community members, issues at the center of people's core beliefs and values, or issues surrounded by passionate political debate (Conyers and Stone 2024). While the previous section was devoted to navigating challenging moments,

it is important to note that when facilitators are not in good headspaces, they do not facilitate as well as they should. In this section, we will discuss how facilitators exercise better self-care when they prepare for and respond to challenging situations with the support of their community of fellow practitioners.

#### *PRACTICES OF SELF-CARE*

Self-care begins with self-awareness and routine practices focusing on maintaining health and well-being. Many facilitators, with their focus being on supporting their learners, will downplay or sacrifice their own needs in service of those they are teaching. Facilitators must recognize when they are not at their best and understand their own needs and boundaries. This self-awareness allows facilitators to take proactive steps like meditation, reflective journaling, physical activity, and connecting with loved ones. Practicing self-care in these ways can help facilitators stay centered and calm, reduce anxiety, boost energy, and improve focus (Stebnicki 2007). Working with a professional counselor is also an excellent practice and is highly recommended in cases involving particularly traumatic material. Facilitators should not hesitate to access mental health resources to address any distress they may experience. Counseling can provide a more comfortable space to explore feelings, develop coping strategies, and maintain emotional well-being.

#### *SELF-CARE IN COMMUNITY*

Building a community of practice and aligning with community organizations are also essential components of facilitator self-care (Lave and Wenger 1991). Aligning oneself with a community of practitioners who have similar experiences and/or focus on

similar issues offers a space for facilitators to share experience, seek advice, and gain encouragement. Facilitators can also benefit from aligning with community organizations that share their values and goals. These organizations provide opportunities to see the important tangible impact of our work and to connect with individuals and groups who benefit from our efforts. Engaging in these regular processing experiences with community enables us to establish more sustainable self-care practices.

#### **FACILITATION TECHNIQUES**

As we have discussed, building trust, creating brave spaces, and caring for self and learners help to enhance learner capacity for challenge and capability. Facilitation techniques can also be used to maintain and enhance capacity and capability in real time as you work through learning. We often think about these techniques in two camps: 1) listening and probing and 2) processing and deepening. This section of the chapter will excavate these approaches and suggest how they may be applied.

#### *FACILITATING QUESTIONS BEHIND QUESTIONS*

**Chris** — I was facilitating a discussion on suicide prevention, a subject that frequently touches people in significant ways. The students in the class had lots of questions. A young woman in the second row, looking a little pained by the discussion, raised her hand, and tepidly asked if people exhibiting warning signs always followed through. Part of our responsibility as facilitators is to recognize and respond to the question being asked. Another part is recognizing and responding to the potential questions or concerns behind the question being asked.

The factual answer to the question is that not all people exhibiting signs attempt suicide, but most people who die by suicide demonstrate warning signs. The prompting for the question was likely one of a few things: Someone she knew may have engaged in warning sign behaviors, attempted, or died by suicide. Very likely, she was also feeling some level of responsibility. I sat on the desk, softened my voice, and asked if any folks in the room knew someone impacted by suicide. Her hand as well as a few other hands went up. I looked at them, nodded, and told them I was sorry for their loss. I reminded them of some of the resources we have on campus and began to gently respond to the question. I shared the factual answer but went on to say that suicide is a tragic loss that impacts many friends, family, and more—all of whom could use our support. There are multiple factors which make suicide attempts more possible, not the least of which is a cultural system that makes it difficult to ask for and get help. I shared that it is often difficult to recognize warning signs in real time. I explained that while we can personally do some things to address warning sign behaviors when we recognize them, it will take more than the work of any one of us as an individual. Finally, I shared that when someone dies by suicide it hurts them and those close to them, that it is not the fault of the folks close to them, and that by learning more about it, we can all do what we can to work together to minimize suicide.

#### *LISTENING AND PROBING*

For our purposes, we will think of listening in a broader sense including not just what we hear, but also in what we gain through observation. Part of careful listening includes effectively reflecting what you are hearing back to your communicating partner, and

in so doing, forming connection with and validating their experience (Jacobs et al. 2015). When we listen carefully, we get lots of cues about where people are situated in relation to an issue. In the narrative just discussed, there were cues in what the student said, how they embodied their engagement, and what they did not say. Taken together, these cues prompted some probing. While there are multiple ways to probe a learner's thinking, we usually begin with reflection.

#### *REFLECTION*

Reflection is a powerful tool in letting your partners in learning know that you recognize and understand them. It can be used to connect with the participant, validate what is being shared, or summarize multiple things that have been shared (Jacobs et al. 2015). As facilitators, we can reflect what learners are expressing back to them with our body, our voice, and our language. Reflecting with our body is usually referred to as mirroring, and interestingly is a practice that has been observed across interpersonal interactions, including with babies. When people connect with other people, they somewhat less consciously begin to adapt their nonverbal physical expressions to match the person with whom they are connecting. One smiles, the other smiles. One crosses their legs, the other often does the same. A second way reflection happens is through using our voice, paraphrasing or stating back to our communicating partners what they just said. Maintaining a similar tone functions similarly. Reflecting in this way can take place in person, but it can also take place in email, text, and a host of other mediated forms of communication. Vocal tone and language choice become more important in formats like Zoom where the physical mirroring is less readable. When

not done in an obviously mocking way, any of these applications make people feel more comfortable, more heard, more understood, and encouraged to engage. In his narrative, Chris sitting down on the desk, altering his vocal tone, and carefully choosing his language that reflected what he believed to be the learner's concerns were all attempts to use reflection to recognize the concern, enhance connection, and validate participant experiences.

#### *EMBODIMENT*

Once we have effectively listened and understood, we can provide support, enhance challenge, and/or focus participant learning by negotiating the embodied experience of the learner. We use eye contact; vocal tone, volume, and speed; and physical posture, positioning, and proximity to accomplish this task. As was the case in Chris's narrative example, there are times we want learners to feel supported in tackling issues with which they are already struggling. In such moments, we want to provide more support. There are times when material comes too easily, allowing learners to retrack their thinking toward other more interesting challenges. In these moments, we want to intensify the challenge. We can both provide more support and intensify challenge by negotiating the embodied experience of the learner.

We all have social norms, conventions, within our cultural groups about how we use our body to connect. Again, we want to be leery of assuming that every member of a group fits all the group norms. The trick is learning the patterns of the people with whom you are interacting. While none of the considerations we will discuss in this section should be understood as universal truths with respect to intent or outcome, social norms for interactions

within groups offer some insight, and we can use those norms as a starting point. Research and previous experience can provide you with some understanding of generalized group norms before you begin your engagements. So, before we start facilitating, we should learn about the populations with whom we are working. We recommend that you align your opening activity with this base understanding of the group norms. Then, as you engage the learners, carefully observe how they are engaging, and take the cues for how to intensify or lessen connections based on their responses.

Like most embodied choices, the ways in which eye contact impacts someone is shaped by the perception of what is normally appropriate for which kind of interaction. When you are talking about the weather, it carries a different expectation than talking about a recent loss. There is a correlating level of expected intimacy and vulnerability with eye contact. Think of intimacy as the closeness one has with another person or a subject; as intimacy increases, there is an increased expectation of eye contact. Consider working with a group and locking your eye contact on a person as you finish saying, "What is your favorite color?" The longer you hold it with them, the more pressure they will feel to respond. You can also use eye contact to disconnect and broaden the conversation. Imagine a scenario in which the learner states something, you reflect what you heard from them, and then you move your eye contact to others and say, "What do folks think about that?" The original learner will feel disinclined to continue, and others will feel more inclined to contribute. In the narrative example, looking at the students who raised their hands, nodding, and maintaining eye contact while talking through the issue established more connection and support. Imagine how the impact would be different if, instead, Chris turned away and

looked at the blackboard while discussing the issue. At best, that would have focused their attention on what was on the board. At its worst, those students would have felt ignored. Alternatively, holding eye contact for too long can provide so much pressure that it prompts learners to look away or show other signs of being disturbed.

As we adapt our eye contact, distance, and physical positioning to best engage our learners, we also adapt our vocal choices. Different situations call for different variations of vocal tone, volume, and speed. In Chris's suicide prevention class discussion scenario, learners were grappling with a very intimate issue coupled with fear, guilt, and confusion. In this case, speaking more softly, quietly, and slowly eased some of the tension, allowing us to have a serious but supportive conversation about really challenging material. In other scenarios, the facilitator might want to use voice to establish a high energy, playful discussion. In such a case, one might speak more quickly, vary the volume, and incorporate a less serious tone. Vocal speed frequently relates to the energy or drive of the experience. Tone frequently relates to the emotional concern or seriousness of a situation. Volume relates to both, though, it seems to vary more by person how it does so. We all grow up in different families and both quiet and loud can mean a lot of different things. We should be attentive to learner responses to all of these, perhaps especially in the case of volume.

How we physically carry and position ourselves in relation to learners is also important. A quick search on the internet will provide you with many ways to read body posture, positioning, and distance, and far too many codes regarding what specific gestures always mean. Most of these codes hold little reliability across groups of people. There is some reasonable reliability in the

work on micro-expressions, minute facial expressions of emotion that happen fast and are then covered by social performance (Gong, An, and Elfiky 2022). While one can learn to recognize these expressions, most facilitators cannot read and process them fast enough to make them a viable tool for our purpose. There is, however, some similarity in how people respond to comfortable and uncomfortable moments with respect to their own social norms. People grow up with different distances they expect for personal space. Like eye contact and voice, space needs vary based on intimacy. Even though the distances differ by person and differ by context, as you violate their comfortable distance, they will move away. Once you learn where those distances are, you can determine how you want to navigate them to provide support or add challenge. Don't forget what we have already discussed regarding capacity and capability. You want the best combination of challenge and support. We are not attempting to break people down. Learning how our participants experience our facilitated learning engagements helps us determine when to use facilitation skills, when to step back from support or challenge, and how to enhance both their capacity and capability for challenge, all in order to enable deeper learning.

#### *PERSONALIZING/DEPERSONALIZING*

Content material feels more personal when it is about our own experiences, directly or indirectly. When we engage in experiential learning and role play simulations, we are then thinking through things through the frame of our own experience. Similarly, engaging in service learning provides an opportunity to form relational connections with the community, making their challenges and opportunities more important to us on a

personal level. Detailed narrative examples help us feel like we are observing the moment being described, and in a way, allow us to form relational connections (supportive or oppositional) with the people described in the narratives. These narratives accomplish this better when they are vivid (looks like, sounds like, feels like) and contextual (who, what, when, where, how, and why). Prompting learners to fill in the experiential blanks and prompting them to process the vivid and contextual details of those moments is yet another way to enhance personal connection. Just as relational connections are primary for any of us to learn, they are primary in personalizing material.

There are times though, when the material becomes too personal for learners and results in inner or outer conflict. Spirited debates, in some cases, have evolved into escalating anger and potential physical attacks. More common, we have all had a set of learners who left our engagements a little too upset with their colleagues in learning and/or having full faith that their one personal experience outweighs an abundance of well collected, reliable, and valid data. In cases where conflict escalates, there are two general responses you can try. The first is to engage learners from the outside and use embodied skills to calm them down, moving forward with slower and softer speech, altering proximity, and bringing their bodies into less defensive or aggressive positions (by asking those in the room to sit down with you, for example). Alternatively, split people up and shift exercises. In cases where learners are struggling with perspective, situating the experience in the larger field of data or using language that repositions the learner in relation to the experience can both be effective.

Our job as facilitators is to personalize when doing so accomplishes more learning, and recognize when we need to dial things

back a bit. Our job is also to help folks establish a perspective that includes more than just their own experience. Consider Chris's narrative example. Students were learning about suicide and suicide prevention. Some students had more direct experience with the issue and others had less. Generally, we would not start with detailed material on a subject like this, because it is already so close to some participants. For those less experienced learners, they need to understand what people are struggling with, the sociocultural structural issues, and how we can support those who are struggling. The learners in this situation gave us some cues indicating that they had some personal connection to the content. Chris used the previously mentioned embodiment skills to connect with them more personally. He then spoke about how folks who did not recognize cues are not at fault and how the social situation makes it hard to see these cues. These choices repositioned learners in a more distant and objective location, attempting to depersonalize and relieve a certain level of felt responsibility, specifically targeting the potential guilt they may have been carrying. Then, he used language in a way that repositioned the learners as personal actors working collectively toward improvement. With these moves, he personalized for connection, depersonalized the guilt, and personalized productive efforts toward change.

#### *FACILITATING PROCESS AND DEPTH*

**Leslie** — The first workshop I ever designed and facilitated tackled the challenging subject of combating rape culture, a topic that quickly highlighted our students' diverse experiences and varying degrees of familiarity with the material. From individuals unfamiliar with the term "rape culture," to skeptics questioning

its existence, to those who firmly aligned with the way American culture can normalize sexual abuse. Accommodating each student's starting point and meeting them where they are with this material became a primary consideration in the workshop's design. To do this, I had to create opportunities for the students to engage in this material on various levels.

The workshop began with a gallery exercise that allowed students to engage with the material privately. The classroom was transformed into a gallery space with thought-provoking images and texts displayed across the walls. The students were invited to walk, observe, and place notes on each display. This activity allowed for reflection of the material on an individual level before transitioning to a group discussion. After the students took their seats, I took each image and read each comment posted aloud. This allowed me to acknowledge everyone's contribution to the activity and see what the student's individual experiences with rape culture were before I opened the discussion to the class.

The verbal and nonverbal language was a telling indicator of the student's familiarity with the topic. For instance, an image featuring a 2015 Bud Light advertisement (Chappell 2015) sparked intense debate. The bottle's label reads: "The perfect beer for removing 'no' from your vocabulary for the night." This advertisement elicited contrasting reactions amongst the men and women in the class. Most of the men interpreted it as a harmless endorsement of spontaneity, while most of the women recognized its uncomfortable alignment with an alcohol-fueled rape culture on American college campuses. Another example in the gallery exercise was a tweet that read, "Damn, that test raped me. It was so hard." There were those who responded with, "It was a bad joke, but it is just a joke," and it was not that serious while four others mentioned that comparing an exam to a deeply

traumatic event minimized their experiences and normalizes this type of violence.

Guiding the discussion, I posed questions aligning with the workshop's overarching goal: recognizing how ingrained beliefs and attitudes perpetuate sexual violence in American society. How can this be interpreted? How can advertisements like these perpetuate a chain of behaviors and daily practices? How can sexist attitudes, jokes, and locker-room banter lead to catcalling, nonconsensual touch, unsolicited photos/videos, and stalking? How can we change this culture? Remarkably, as the conversation progressed, there was a perceptible shift in language among the students—initial dismissals transformed into considerations, and skepticism evolved into empathy and reflection. Students who started off by saying "It is not that deep" began making comments like "I can see how someone else might find this offensive" or ask questions like "Did they not test these advertisements before they went out?"

To foster even deeper engagement and understanding of the material, I then put students into smaller groups based on their responses in the gallery exercise. For students in the group who were encountering these discussions for the first time, this format offered a supportive space to deconstruct societal norms while learning from their peers in a way that made sense to them. For those who understood the concept of rape culture and wanted more, this format allowed them to share their own experiences and discuss ways to respond. Have we heard someone say this before? Who do you think is making this statement? What are gender roles? What are stereotypical roles for men and women? How do we think this would make someone feel? What would I say if I heard someone tell this to my sister or to my mother?

To wrap up the session, I encouraged students to share what they discussed in their groups.

#### PROCESSING AND DEEPENING

As we discussed earlier, we can use reflection to validate, clarify, and connect learners to the material, the facilitator, or other learners (Jacobs et al. 2015). Reflection can also be an effective tool to combine with other objectives. In combination, we meet people where they are and then move forward. For example, you might *reflect* the participant's statement and then *redirect* the discussion. In another case, you could *reflect*, then *deepen* the processing of the experience. The advantage of using both approaches allows you to benefit from the validation that accompanies reflection along with the challenge of thinking differently or thinking more deeply that accompanies the others. Reflect and redirect can happen in at least two ways. First, in reflecting the experience back to the learner, the facilitator might find a connectable piece of what they shared and use that connection to pivot the conversation. Second, if the facilitator sees no clear connectable element, reflect what was shared, thank the learner for sharing, and then bridge with something like, "now let's shift gears for a bit." In both cases, the learner was heard and validated.

Reflect and deepen is a little more complex. Deepening learner understanding and ability requires that we can both quickly evaluate their comprehension/skill level and use carefully crafted questions designed to enhance them. To accomplish both tasks, we look to learning theory to understand how people cognitively process material. Bloom's Taxonomy identifies the following "levels" of cognitive processing, suggesting that, to be effective, the latter levels require the former levels to have been reached

before advancing to the next: recall, understand, apply, analyze, evaluate, create (Anderson and Krathwohl 2000). Marzano (1998) similarly identifies retrieval, comprehension, analysis, and knowledge utilization. By carefully listening to what learners say and do, we can learn a lot about the level at which they are currently processing the material.

Consider how Leslie engaged learners in relation to the advertisement that read, "The perfect beer for removing 'no' from your vocabulary for the night." We could already see from the comments posted in the gallery exercise and the discussions happening in small groups that learner experiences and positions in relation to the advertisement were rather different. Some of the students were less familiar with understanding how culture shapes meaning with respect to rape and really thought of the advertisements as separate and not influential. It is not too surprising that the small group comprised of all women recognized the contextual nuances and potential impact of the advertisements on behavior more so than the group comprised of all men. The mixed gender group made statements that were a bit in both arenas. Their learning experiences leading up to the workshop had likely been radically different. As always, we want to be careful about assuming, but in this case, there was a strong correlation to social norms. The all-men group was still working on enhancing comprehension while the all-women group was focusing on application. To tackle this variation in understanding, Leslie combined a few tools. First, she moved to a large group discussion of the advertisement. She called for input from the all-male group, then the mixed group, and then the all-female group. Then she facilitated conversation among them using questions designed to enhance comprehension first and then eventually application. Throughout the discussion, she reflected on what she heard from

each group validating their contribution, posed questions crafted to push their understanding up a level, and facilitated additional contributions from the other groups.

When trying to gauge comprehension, we typically use questions designed to probe the ways in which the learner is experiencing or understanding something. Questions like this often focus on encouraging the learner to describe sensory elements (what it looks like, sounds like, feels like, ...) and context elements (who, what, when, where, how, why). Once we have the nuances, we can gauge the impact and influence on different groups of people. For example, for some people less at risk, the text might mean “be brave, because you only live once.” For others more at risk, the text might mean an increased threat of male aggression. Ironically for both those who have been assaulted and those perpetrating assaults, it might be a communal justification of the violent and dehumanizing act. Broadening the context can help. Advertisers do due diligence in testing the impact of ads; they know the different ways it is being read, they have calculated the likely profit yield, and sadly, they have concluded that selling the idea of sexual violence is lucrative.

We can ask questions that lead to discovering this information, providing an opportunity for the learners to develop a more informed position. How much do advertisements cost? How do advertisers know ads will work? What does that discovery process look like? What similar choices have they made with more obviously violent ads? Who profits from this process? And so on. As a result, learner positions become more nuanced. Once learners have reached understanding, facilitators can move to the next level up and explore with learners how they will use this information. A common model for this process is “What— So what—Now what. What is happening? So, what does that mean? Now, what

do we do about or with that knowledge?” Leslie adds the “now what” component in the next phase of the workshop by having groups identify how they would respond to different scenarios. It is worth noting that while not all groups achieved the highest level of sophistication or nuance in their responses, all increased their levels of processing by the end of the workshop. This can be seen in how they talked about the situations to which they were responding in that final exercise.

### COMMON EXPERIENCES

Thus far, we have provided four narratives. One described a workshop on hate crime prevention conducted with professional responders at a conference. The other three describe moments that took place in college classes. These classroom moments included a workshop on relationship violence, a discussion about suicide prevention, and a workshop about rape culture. We chose these examples because they required heavy facilitation and delicate navigation. So, we were able to pull a lot of techniques out of them.

Longer and more intensive learning engagements like service-learning and simulations will likely require a heavier facilitation touch, as the need for intensive and deep reflection is important. Much of the facilitation we do in our classes and our programs won’t require us to use all the aforementioned techniques, but still necessitate some. Shorter and less sensitive engagements like facilitating class (somewhat less charged) discussions, small group task work, or applications of basic problem solving might not require such close attention to trauma responses, but likely still contend with learners’ confidence and self-efficacy. Being aware of relational and sociocultural contexts, recognizing

learners as whole persons, and integrating inclusive curriculum remain helpful in connecting learners with the engagement. The skills and physical/emotional state of the learner might still require you to attend to capacity and capability even with exercises that appear less threatening. Facilitation skills that attend to cognitive processing (listening, probing, processing, and deepening) apply in almost any learning scenario.

### PULLING IT ALL TOGETHER

In this chapter, we shared four experiences which required the facilitator to adapt the original game plan and use multiple techniques, often in varying combinations. We shared these as a way of excavating three focal points of facilitation: First, we identified the ways in which relationships are foundational to facilitation and are always nuanced by sociocultural contexts. To provide guidance for building effective relationships, we discussed the value of recognizing learners as whole persons and the value of designing curricular content and approach that is inclusive of the variety of diversity represented in our student population. Second, we looked closely at enhancing learner capacity and capability. In this section, we addressed realizing and accepting challenging moments, constructing choices, reshaping our beliefs, and developing communal support as mechanisms to help us navigate such moments. Third, we explored two general families of facilitation techniques to help enhance capacity and capability in real-time adaptation. Within the frame of listening and probing, we explored reflection, embodiment, and personalizing/depersonalizing. Within the frame of processing and deepening, we examined reflection in combination with redirection or deepening and carefully crafting and mobilizing questions.

Fundamental to facilitation is appreciating that while different learners often share some common experiences across different groups, all learners are different. Given this diversity, what does this mean? We can and should do what we can to learn about our students and how they learn. Our structures and curriculum need to be representatively inclusive and multimodal. Still, as facilitators, we will need to develop and adapt our approaches in real time. Hopefully, this chapter provides some approaches and techniques that will help with this endeavor.

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PART 2

# Inclusive Pedagogy Applications

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