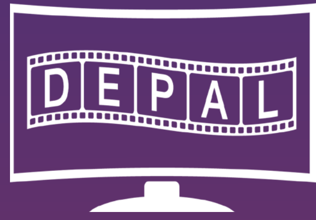

Digital Education
Participatory
Adult Learning

Understanding Participatory and Digital Learning:

A Guide for Adult Educators

PROJECT NUMBER: 2019-1-UK01-KA204-062090

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ABOUT THE DEPAL PROJECT

DEPAL (Digital Education and Participatory Adult Learning) is an Erasmus+ cross-European project being developed by partners from Greece, Italy, the Republic of Ireland, Spain and the UK.

The project supports educators to better engage their adult learners and improve the use of digital technologies, bridging the gaps between participatory education and digital learning through the digital storytelling method.

The project is being delivered in four phases:

Phases 1 and 2 focus on developing the knowledge and skills of educators to deliver more engaging digital learning based on both theory and practice. The theory comes from this project guide. The practice will come from the first international training event, which will lead to and inform the delivery of digital photo story training in all six partner countries.

Phase 3 involves developing and refining an educator's toolkit. A practical resource for educators who wish to deliver digital learning, the toolkit will include case studies, activities, and further guidance on effective facilitation.

Phase 4 focuses on the dissemination of project resources and results. This phase is crucial in widening the reach of the project, and in sharing the learning of all participating educators with others who will go on to use these methods.

The overall aim of this chain of activities is to impact on the wider adult education sector, promoting thinking about how to make adult education engaging and meaningful and increasing the practice of good digital learning. The project will better prepare marginalised adult learners to take fuller roles as 21st century global citizens.

DEPAL PROJECT PARTNERS

Liverpool World Centre is the lead partner in the DEPAL project. Set up twenty years ago to raise awareness of global issues locally, the organisation has developed expertise in participatory education and global issues, working particularly with: schools (pupils and teachers), universities (academics and students), and local communities. We work with partners across the EU and beyond to deliver engaging training and facilitate workshops across a range of methodologies and global topics.

LABC srl is an Italian based learning community dedicated to individual and community wellbeing, group-work, education, training and the labour market. Based on the experience of their senior professionals, LABC adopts the principles of collaborative learning; an unsaturated approach to knowledge to allow everyone to build upon their own limits and discover the pleasure of continuous learning; to guide the ability to create new solutions, new scenarios, new opportunities.

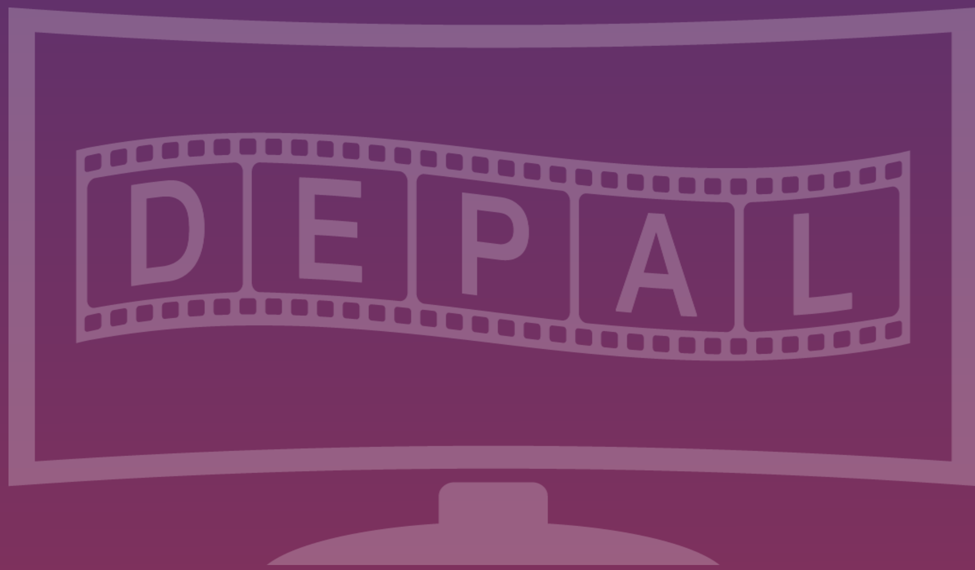
NEO SAPIENS is a European and training social entity whose aim is the design and implementation of educational and mobility projects and local initiatives to promote opportunities on non formal methods and interculturality. It offers NGOs and VET centres support to implement these kinds of activities and the development of learning materials related to them.

Partners Training for Transformation is an Irish-based community development / education organisation which works to build confidence, competence and commitment within and between individuals, groups and communities. They use a learning and action approach called Training for Transformation, based on the work of Paulo Freire, Anne Hope and Sally Timmel. Over almost 40 years of work Partners TfT has sought to maintain continuity with their founding vision, respond creatively to changing community and societal concerns and engage in the design and use of innovative learning processes and events.

The Vardakeios School is focused on foreign language learning and self- enrichment activities such as art and craft workshops for adult local people and immigrants. Their learning community is based on participatory learning where facilitators and beneficiaries can easily change roles. Educational tools for adult education are developed through European projects.

Liverpool Community Spirit is a grass-roots, inter-faith community education charity. They devise and deliver education programmes and resources to promote the inter-faith/ cultural dimensions of inclusive, positive community spirit and wellbeing in the Greater Liverpool region. We are independent of any religious/political affiliation and governed by a Steering Committee of local people of diverse faith (and no faith) and cultures.

Diciannove società cooperativa was established in 2005 as an ICT cooperative focusing on support for organisations active in social issues, and operates mainly in Northern Italy providing solutions to health and social departments in 3 regions and to the National Ministry of Education. Diciannove has 9 associated members and a wide network of collaborators with huge experience in intervention in social and educational fields, with adults as well as youngsters, in issues such as intercultural integration, social inclusion, work-life balance, and the application of ICT tools to health, education and social policies.



Digital Education Participatory
Adult Learning

INTRODUCTION

The proverb says that “a threefold cord is not easily broken”. One thread in this project is Digital Storytelling, and another is Participatory Education. Both serve the needs of adult educators in a variety of contexts. The insight at the heart of the project is that a weaving together of these two threads would provide a powerful resource. A thoughtful, coherent and practical integration of these two approaches would give us a third thread which is a synergistic blend of both. Digital storytelling and Participatory Education would each enhance the other and, blended, would offer a wider range of resources to adult educators.

This guide aims to introduce the context, theory and rationale behind using participatory and digital learning with adults. The guide will be used by adult educators who participate in DEPAL project training and events. We also hope that it will be useful to others working in the field of adult education who are looking to explore and develop their knowledge.

The contents of this guide are aimed at all individuals working in the field of adult education, whether formal or informal. The guide aims to support adult educators in engaging learners and providing them with agency in their learning.

Each chapter of this guide has been written by one of the DEPAL partner organisations across Europe, and as such, each has a different perspective brought from that organisation's own experience and field of expertise. There is a diversity of approach within the partnership that brings great value in itself, and has encouraged each partner to examine their own approach in the context of the overall partnership and in the light of each partner's contribution. What follows is a reflection of different approaches, and an exploration of the links and differences found within these.

Due to the international nature of the partnership, there are some areas in which we have had to negotiate and agree on terminology. One particular example of this within this guide is the use of the term ‘facilitator’ to encompass any and all adult educators, whether they would describe themselves as facilitator, teacher, tutor, trainer, group leader, conductor, or any other of a wide variety of terms that might be used.

The next steps of the DEPAL project will see us putting this guide to work within international and local training delivery, and using it as a building block for the development of a practical toolkit for adult educators later in the project. Both documents will be freely available for public download once complete.

CHAPTER 1

Background Thinking: Participatory Adult Learning

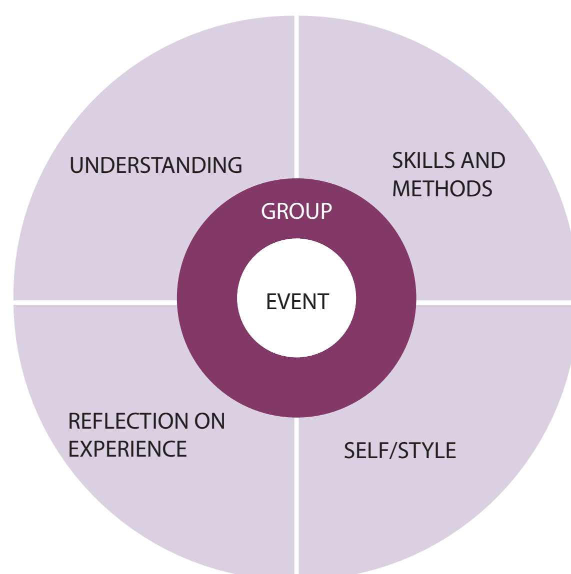
CHAPTER 1

Background Thinking: Participatory Adult Learning

INTRODUCTION

"I want to use a participatory education approach with a group. What are the key elements I must be mindful of and attend to, if participants are to have a positive and productive experience?" This chapter strives to answer that question.

Based on our experience and research (sources listed at end of guide) we outline seven inter-related elements that we see as key for a facilitator/educator. The seven elements which must be attended to are: the event(s) being organised, the group being worked with, the context of the work, the thinking (theory, ideas, frameworks) the facilitator draws on, the methods and skills chosen for use by the facilitator, engagement in reflection, the facilitator's self-knowledge and awareness of their own style. These are shown in the diagram below.



In this chapter we offer:

- ► A case study (The Education Triangle) which illustrates a participatory education approach.
- ► A detailed description (A Way of Seeing: Metaframe) of each of the seven elements shown in the diagram above.
- ► Three sections (Change and Transformation, Three Sources of Knowledge, and Three Forms of Authority) which deal primarily with concepts and ideas.
- ► Five sections (Contrasting Models A and B; Purpose, People and Process; The Content and Process Action Quadrant; the Story Diamond; and Diverse Purposes, Diverse Methods) which are mostly concerned with methodology.
- ► A section (Self and Style) on the need for reflection, self-knowledge and self-awareness on the part of the facilitator/educator and the part that Reflection plays in that.

Throughout the chapter there are real life examples which illustrate and ground the dynamic interplay of the seven elements.

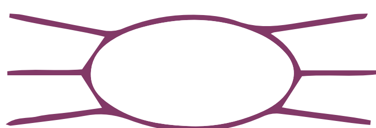
A CASE STUDY: THE EDUCATION TRIANGLE

We begin with a story. We in Partners were invited with work with a group of people involved in education in a large housing complex. The area was home to resilient families, energetic and dedicated community builders and supportive community workers. The area was also marked by high unemployment rates, illegal drug use and decaying infrastructure. The group we worked with had a particular focus on education and were involved in a wide range of initiatives: supporting children to remain in school, homework clubs, individual tutoring for adults returning to formal education, personal development groups, a history project, community arts projects and festivals. We were impressed at the range of activities and the skill and dedication of those involved.

However, members of the group felt that they were often at cross purposes and that miscommunication was common. A number expressed the view that while all the different projects were worthwhile there was not a coherent and shared understanding of the overall education group's purpose. This was resulting in fragmentation and at times competition for scarce resources. We listened.

After a number of consultations, we met with the whole group for a workshop. Following an initial check in, we clarified our brief: to help the group develop a common and shared understanding of their purpose and the role of the different projects from an educational perspective.

We used an exercise called Word spiders. This involved people spontaneously jotting down words evoked by a key word. Three key words were offered. The final key word was EDUCATION. (Further detail on this and other exercises and processes will appear in the Toolkit for this project). The group of 12 people who were present generated 53 different words relating to education. No two people in the room had more than 3 words in common. The diversity of thinking about education was noted.



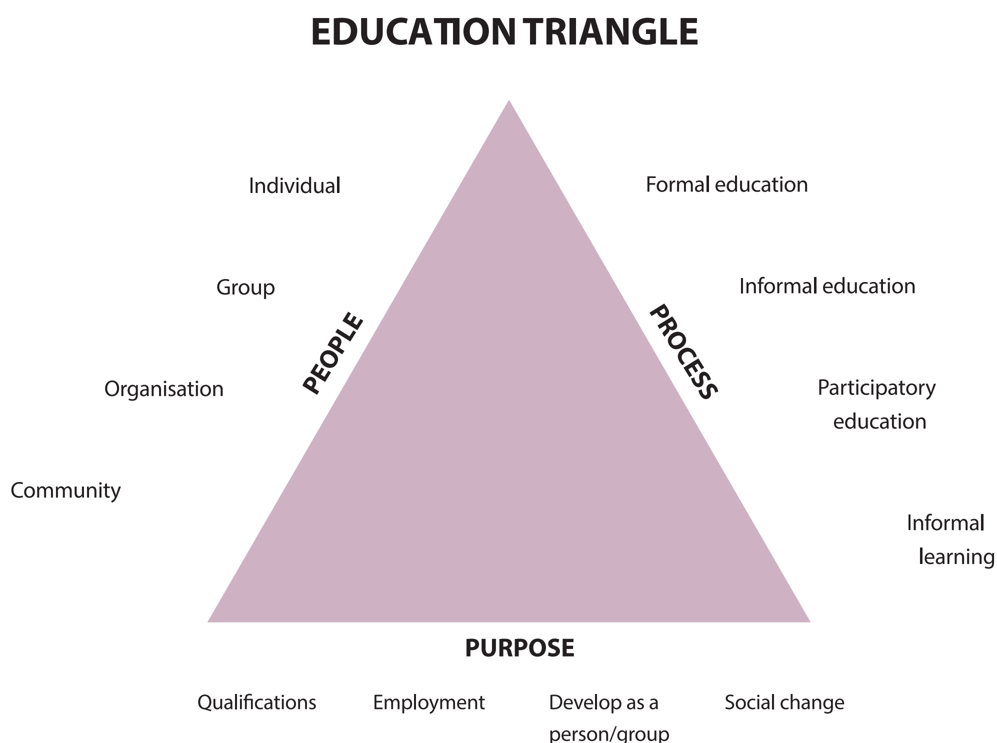
We followed this with a period of reflection where each person jotted down their responses to questions on a worksheet called Education at its Best. This asked people to consider their involvement in the area and to choose a particular event or situation where they saw education at its best. People shared their responses in threes. We made sure that there was a mix of people from different initiatives in each group. After the sharing we asked the participants to say something about the experience of sharing and hearing the different stories. We recorded their responses to the two last questions :

► If you wrote a short story or made a film about this situation/event what would the title of the story or film be?
► Based on this experience what would you say are the key features of education? One way of answering this is by completing the sentence: At its best education is…

A rich, complex and diverse picture of education was unfolding.

We told the group that we had reflected on what we had heard from people during the initial consultation sessions and that we were going to offer a diagram representing this to see if it resonated with them.

We presented the Education Triangle [1] (see diagram).



We said we had arranged what we heard from them into three categories: People, Process and Purpose.

In relation to People we noticed that the focus of some group members was individual (a particular child they were encouraging to remain in school or supporting a particular adult to return to formal education), for others it was a group (local history group or mental health support group). The focus of others was building up organisations which would regenerate the community and finally some said that whole community learning together was the focus of their work.

In terms of Process we noted that the members of the group engaged in different educational processes. For some it was formal education with an emphasis on school or college and set curricula. For others it was using informal means like homework clubs or personalised support to resource those for whom formal education presented challenges. Others stressed the value of participatory education where the experience of the learners was central and methods were mainly centred on engagement rather than delivery of content. And finally, there were members of the group who stressed the informal learning that accrued from community activism, political action or involvement in arts projects. They saw this informal learning which came from reflection on these different forms of community engagement as crucial.

We then outlined what we had heard from them about the Purpose of education. We suggested four basic purposes: to get qualifications, to get a job, to develop as a person/group/organisation, and social change. We checked to see if the Education Triangle was a reasonably accurate reflection of the diversity of views in the group. After some discussion it was accepted, with the caveat that some projects had multiple purposes rather than singular ones.

A large-scale version of the Education Triangle was placed on the floor and participants were invited to consider three questions in relation to the project they were working on. The questions were:

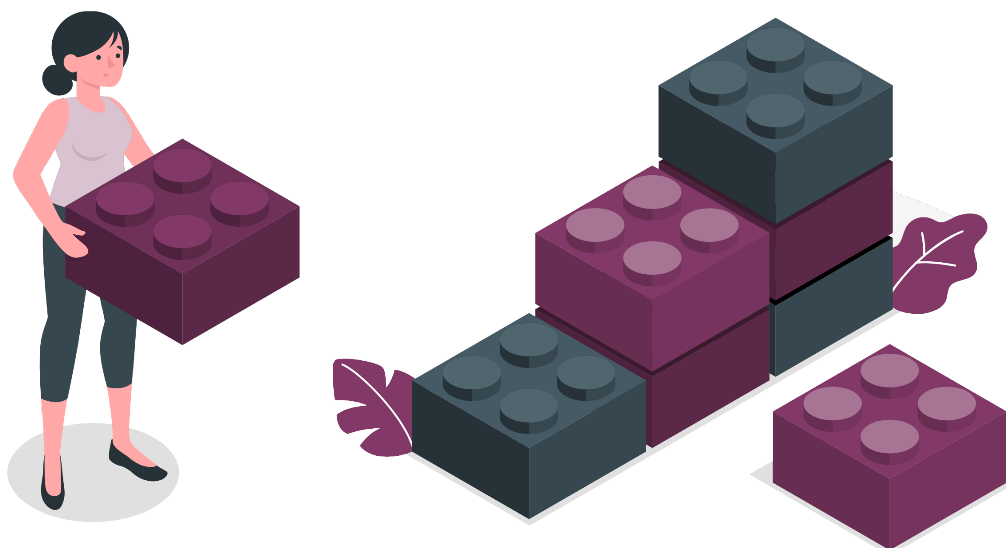
Thinking specifically about your project,

WHO DO YOU FOCUS ON?	**PEOPLE**
THROUGH WHICH MEANS?	**PROCESS**
AND TOWARDS WHAT END?	**PURPOSE**

We asked people one by one to show us their responses to the questions by walking to the different points on the Education Triangle. One person walked to the People line and said, “I work with individuals”, then moved to the Process line and said, “I run an informal homework club” and continued to the Purpose line saying, “I want people to pass their exams and get a qualification”. Another talked about a group of women on a local history project recording stories from local women. She saw this as participatory education and its purpose being about personal change (valuing their own stories and those of the women of the area) and social change (encouraging the women to see themselves as history makers not history takers). This continued until each person had responded to the questions.

We gave people a chance to reflect on all they had seen and heard. A general discussion ensued.

A number of themes emerged from the discussion. There was a sense of relief from participants that all the different projects were seen to be making a valuable contribution to the educational needs of the area. Some had been fearful of a prioritising of projects which might create a kind of hierarchy of value. There was movement from people holding a single and very specific idea of education to recognising more inclusive and diverse ones. People tending their own plot were able to stand back and see the whole landscape and better understand the contribution each project was making. **The complementary nature of the different initiatives was clearer, as was the sense that the diverse needs of the community were being addressed. No one project had all the answers.** Finally, the understanding generated by the storytelling and the inclusive nature of the Education Triangle strengthened the capacity of the participants to engage with each other in more cooperative and perhaps less competitive ways.

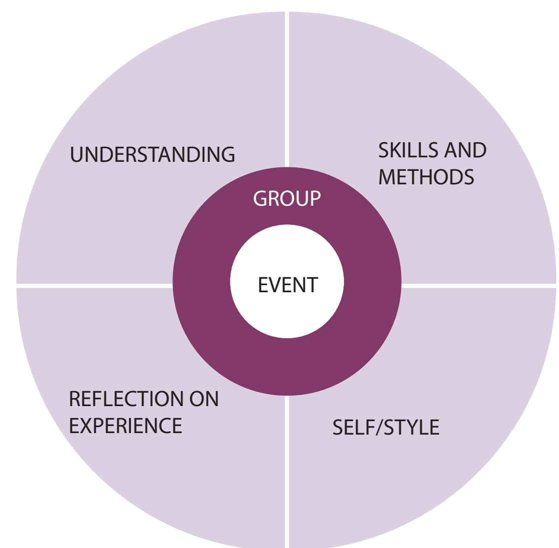


A WAY OF SEEING: A META FRAME

" A frame is a mental model - a set of ideas and assumptions - that you carry in your head to help you understand and negotiate a particular "territory". A good frame makes it easier to see what you are up against and, ultimately, what you can do about it".
-Bolman, Lee, G. and Deal, Terence, E. (2008) Reframing Organizations San Francisco: Jossey- Bass. p. 11

"Frames are mental structures that shape the way we see the world. As a result, they shape the goals we seek, the plans we make, the way we act, and what counts as a good or bad outcome of our actions".
-Lakoff, George. (2004) Don't Think of an Elephant! (Know your Values and Frame the Debate). Vermont: Chelsea Green Publishing. p. xv.

Over the years we in Partners Training for Transformation have developed different ways of looking at or framing the work which we organise ourselves or are invited to do by others. We have created a meta-frame which helps us hold seven key inter-related elements in a kind of creative tension as we plan for and engage in the work. The diagram below shows the seven elements.



Event: there is always an event or series of events. It may be a course we are organising on Creative Facilitation, an Inter-Cultural Training for Transformation course in a local community, a request from an organisation to help them reflect on their work, plan for the future, or support them in resolving a conflict. We try to ensure that there is clarity about the nature of the event, that our understanding and that of the participants is congruent. We check out assumptions and expectations on the part of all involved.

Group: We may be working with a group, an organisation or representatives of a community. We inquire into their history and background and how well people know each other. (We are often surprised by how little people who have been working together for a long time actually know about each other). We try and get a sense of the stage of development of the group or organisation, and its dynamics. We are aware that we are intervening in a living system and try to make our intervention supportive.

Context: Over the years we have come to recognise the importance of context. Working with a group of paid professional people in a hierarchical organisation is often different from working with volunteers in a local community. Culture, class, gender, religious differences, political traditions, etc. can all play a part in shaping the context and in turn shaping the nature of our intervention. For example we might be engaged in two very similar pieces of work in Northern Ireland and in the Republic of Ireland but historical legacies, cultural, political and religious affiliations may create quite different contexts and shape different interventions.

Understanding: when we are planning and facilitating an event with a group in a particular context, we are availing of a range of theories, frameworks, ideas, insights and concepts. The ideas we draw on relate to groups and group development, culture, community, social context, education, facilitation, communication and dialogue, etc. They are useful in helping us "see" or discern what is going on and what might be an appropriate response.

Skills and Methods: We draw from a wide range of skills and methods: photographs, movement, worksheets, personal reflection, incomplete sentences, codes, short inputs, storytelling etc. We are mindful of three things when choosing methods. We like to facilitate a high level of interaction in groups. We recognise that participants have a diversity of learning styles. And we believe that the experiences participants bring are an invaluable resource for a group.

Reflection: We approach the question of reflection in four different ways [2]. Before an event we reflect on our prior experience of past similar events to see what we have learned that might be useful. We do not believe that events are ever predictable, but we do believe that they are patterned. Recognition of patterns and recurring issues equips us to deal with them.

During an event we engage in reflection in action. We try to be sensitive to and aware of the unfolding dynamics as we engage in the work. **We strive to notice what is happening in the group and in ourselves and change and adapt as appropriate**.

After the event we reflect on what has happened, what went well or badly, what we did and why, what we might do differently. But we are primarily interested in what we are learning from this event.

There is one more form of reflection in which we engage. At all stages of a piece of work we endeavour to be aware of the assumptions we are making and the approach we are taking. However, at the conclusion of a piece of work we have an opportunity to stand further back and look at the ways in which we have been framing and engaging in the work. We look at the frames through which we have been viewing the work, thinking about it and doing it and we test the validity of these. Our capacity to do this comes from employing a diversity of approaches rather than a single one. Holding multiple and different perspectives challenges us to see a wider range of possibilities and not get stuck in a particular one.

Self: The final part of our meta-frame is the self. The focus here is on the person of the educator or facilitator. It is about being aware of one's values, identities, strengths, frailties, learning style and leadership style. It concerns self-knowledge and also involves a sense of how we impact on others or how they experience us. It is a recognition that as I approach a piece of work, I am bringing my thinking, feelings, methods and values. I am bringing my whole self.

Being aware of and attending to these seven elements helps us to respond creatively to the dynamic and unfolding nature of the work.

CONCEPTS AND IDEAS

The following three sections (Change and Transformation, Three Sources of Knowledge, and Three Forms of Authority) deal primarily with concepts and ideas.

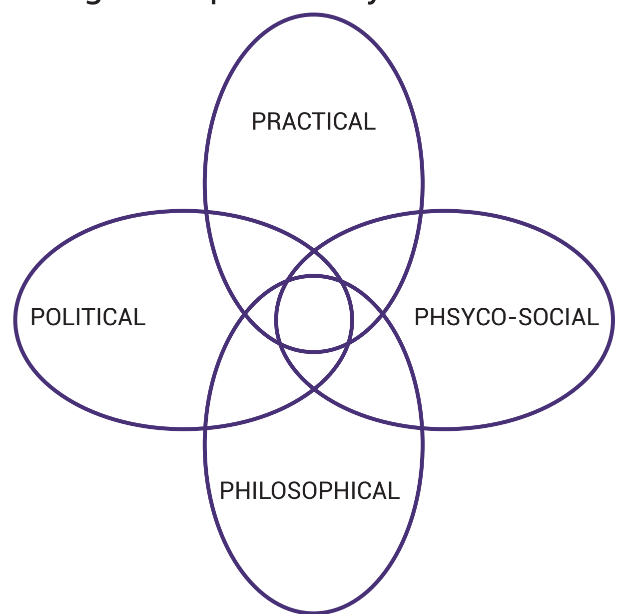
CHANGE AND TRANSFORMATION [3]

The word transformation appears in the name of our organisation and in the way we describe our work. We offer two ways in which we understand the term.

Transformation is often understood and spoken about as change. But what kind of change, one might ask. “Positive” and “fundamental” are common responses to the question. An individual may experience a change in terms of skills and abilities, sense of self, or life perspective. They may learn to do things they previously could not do. They may develop an enhanced sense of self with a greater appreciation of themselves and their different identities. Their life perspective may broaden and

become more inclusive of diverse experiences and ideas. A change can occur in any one of these dimensions and be regarded as positive. However, what makes a change transformative is that although it may begin in one dimension it broadens out to the other dimensions and encompasses the whole person. For example, I may learn how to do something and because of that my sense of self is enhanced and my perspective on life is changed. Or I may begin to experience myself in a more wholesome and appreciative way, and that changes the way I see the world and opens up possibilities of what I can do. Transformation happens when a person undergoes a fundamental shift in how they are in the world, how they engage with the world and how they see the world.

Our second way of looking at transformation contains elements of the first but is configured differently. There are four elements; practical, political, psycho-social and philosophical. Briefly, the practical refers to the way we do things. The political is concerned with power relationships. The psycho-social element makes reference to the way people and groups perceive themselves and also to the way they are perceived by others. And the philosophical element is our worldview or the perspective we have on life. Again, a positive change can prove very beneficial for individuals or groups. People may learn new skills or enhance existing abilities. People who experienced themselves are powerless may discover strengths and begin to redress power imbalances. At a psycho-social level individual and groups may reclaim in strong and positive ways identities which either they or the wider society did not value. Or people may experience a perspective or philosophical shift from seeing the world and their place in it as given and unchangeable, to a realisation that change is possible and that they can be agents of change.

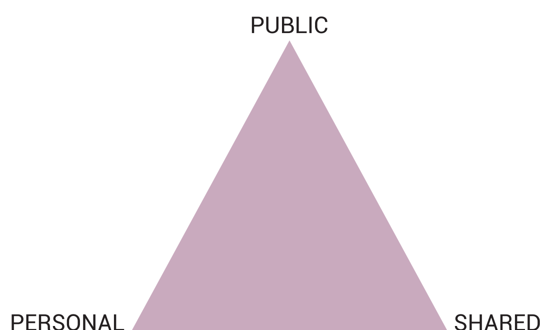


However as stated earlier, the **change becomes transformational when a change in one element results in changes in the other three elements.** As suggested in the image of the flower above, transformation is by nature dynamic and unfolding. With transformation not only does each petal (element) grow but the same energy and release of potential causes the growth and development of the whole organism. To be truly transformative change in one area must occasion change in the other areas.

THREE SOURCES OF KNOWLEDGE [4]

The question of knowledge is a key one in Participatory Learning and Education. There is an emphasis on the experience, knowledge and skills that learners bring. The role of the educator is often seen as enabling learners to identify and appreciate what they know and to build on this. Learners often feel validated and encouraged by the recognition of them as knowledgeable and experienced. This can be a change from previous educational experiences where they were perceived as “empty vessels” to be filled by an all-knowing teacher.

In our work with groups and communities we have found it useful to think of there being three sources of knowledge present in any learning event. These are public, personal and shared knowledge. The diagram captures this:



The public area of knowledge is, in principle, open to everyone through public texts, whether academic or professional papers and textbooks, online resources, government documents etc.

The personal area of knowledge is primarily private, known to the individual. It involves the different experiences, thoughts, feelings, life histories, knowledge, skills etc. individuals bring with them.

The shared area of knowledge comprises the ideas, insights, discoveries derived from or generated by the interactive process being used.

If we wish to avail of knowledge from the public, personal and shared areas, then we need to intentionally design learning events to achieve this. Formal educational events often prioritise the task of making public knowledge accessible to learners. Lectures are a good example of this. Or a process may begin with the sharing of ‘public’ stories, as is described in chapter 4, using the stories of diverse faiths.

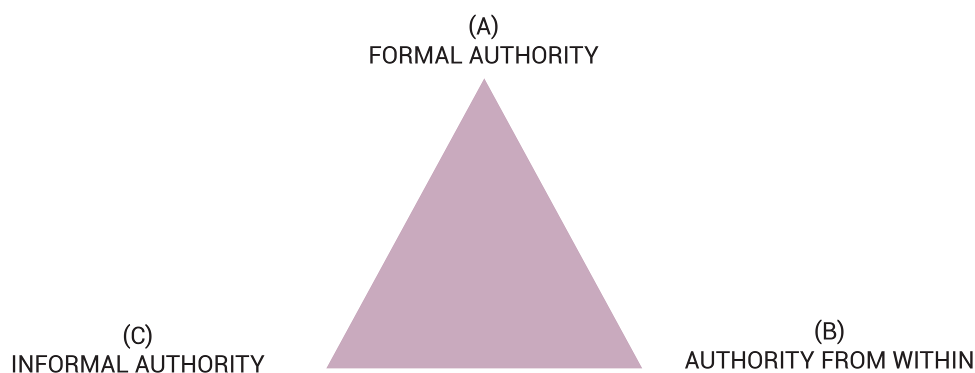
Participatory education emphasises personal knowledge and shared knowledge and uses methods designed to elicit and promote interaction, as well as drawing on public knowledge. We recognise that formal and participatory education can have different starting points, use different methods and serve different purposes. However, it is important to value knowledge from each of the three sources, as knowledge from any one area can affirm, enhance or challenge and contradict knowledge from other areas.

THREE FORMS OF AUTHORITY [5]

"Credibility: The quality that somebody/something has that makes people believe or trust them".
Oxford Dictionary.

"Authority: The moral or legal right or ability to control".
Cambridge Dictionary.

We are often invited to work with groups and we find that the issue of credibility and authority is a recurring one. Through our reflection and reading we have developed a simple framework that helps us look at the issue. We find it useful to consider three different forms of authority; formal, informal and authority from within. In the diagram an organisation (A) invites us, Partners TfT(B), to work with a group (C).



We are invited to do the work by A because A perceives us to be credible. This may be because they have heard about us from a source they trust, or they know of our track record, or we have established through conversation or in writing that we are a match for their requirement. We go to work with C. In the course of our work with C it is important that they experience us as credible, as trustworthy, competent, honest and reliable. The third form of credibility is that we, B, are credible to ourselves, that we believe in ourselves, in our ability and judgement and are aware of our limits.

Linked to the question of credibility is that of authority. When we are credible to A, then A authorises us to do the work. This authority is formal and recognises that A commissions B to do the work with C. The second form of authority is what C has. This is more informal but no less necessary. If C does not "authorise" us (B) to do the work, then the work cannot be fruitful. C's authorisation is often in the form of a willingness to collaborate, cooperate and participate in activities. The third form of authority is authority from within. This derives from our, B's, self-belief, confidence and competence.

Our experience is that **when there is acknowledgement of and respect for the three forms of authority, then conflictual issues can be managed more fruitfully.** For example, recently we were invited by an organisation to work with a group on the themes of power and leadership. The group were on a community development training programme. In the course of the work issues of conflict within the group, and between the group and course organisers arose. Dealing with these issues was beyond the brief that we had been given by the organisation. But it was clear that the group wanted to see the issues addressed in some way. And our sense was that the conflict offered an opportunity to ground the work we were doing on power and leadership. We spoke with the course organisers and the group about including some work that would address the conflict. They both agreed and the work continued. In this case all three forms of authority were acknowledged and respected.

A second example comes from a participant on a facilitation course we ran. She explained that she was asked by an organisation to work with a group. The group was made up of ex-offenders together with family members who had enlisted in a support programme. As she worked with the group she found that there was often a divergence between what was arising for the group during a particular session and what was prescribed for that session. Group members were becoming frustrated when an issue arose that had energy and importance for them but could not be addressed because it did not fit into that session. Telling them that the issue would be dealt with in the next session or some future session added to their frustration. The facilitator felt that invaluable opportunities to do important and timely work with the group were being lost. She brought her concerns to the organisation which had commissioned her to do the work and sought more flexibility in the way the programme was run. She was told that she must be "faithful to the programme" and continue with the sessions as prescribed. The programme was based on thorough research and should be run as designed. The experience of the group and her experience were

discounted. She continued and the members of the group became uninterested and passive and she, in her own words, “became robotic.” In this case there was no room for the informal authority of the group or the inner authority of the facilitator. The formal authority trumped all other forms.

In our experience, a recognition of the different forms of authority and an appropriate balancing of these works best.

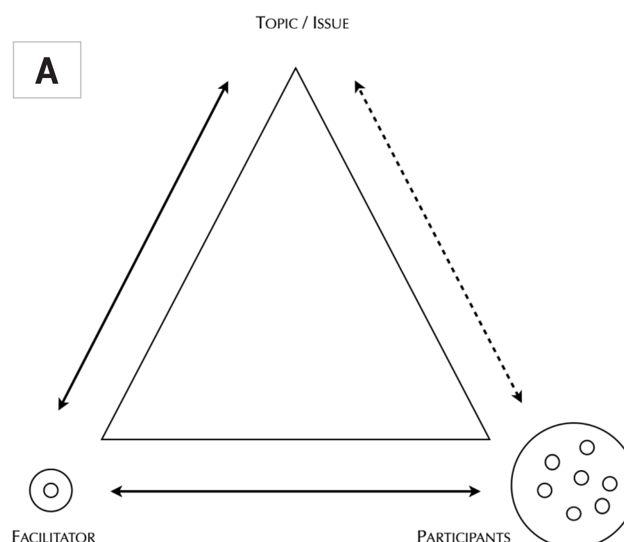
METHODOLOGY

These five sections (Contrasting Ways of Approaching Facilitation; Purpose, People and Process; The Content and Process Action Quadrant; the Story Diamond; and Diverse Purposes, Diverse Methods) are mostly concerned with methodology.

TWO CONTRASTING WAYS OF APPROACHING THE FACILITATION OF LEARNING EVENTS. [6]

Here are two contrasting ways of approaching work with a group in a learning context. We call them Model A and Model B. Model A is one we have experienced ourselves as learners or participants. Model B is what we try to work out of ourselves. They are represented by two simple diagrams which outline the relationship between the facilitator/educator, the participants and the topic/issue being considered. The ideas or assumptions underlying each model are noted.

We begin with Model A.



The ideas and assumptions underlying this model are:

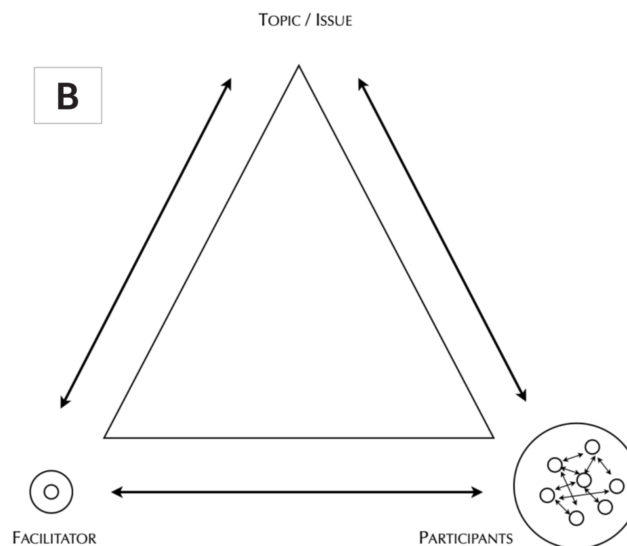
► The facilitator/educator has familiarity with and knowledge of the topic/issue.

► The facilitator/educator works on the assumption that participants have limited or no knowledge of the topic/issue (indicated by the broken line).

► The facilitator/educator has responsibility for the design and facilitation of a process which will:

(a) Foster a working relationship between the facilitator and the participants.
(b) Deliver information about the topic/issue to the participants.
(c) Check for levels of comprehension of the material presented.
(d) Invite participants to make connections between the material presented and their situation.
(e) Encourage participants to integrate the material into their skills/knowledge base and make practical use of it.

Model B differs from Model A in a number of ways.



The ideas and assumptions underlying this model are:

► The facilitator/educator has familiarity with and knowledge of the topic/issue.

► **The facilitator/educator works on the assumption that the participants have experience and knowledge of the topic/issue.** Participants may vary in their recognition of their own knowledge and experience.

► The facilitator/educator has responsibility for the design and facilitation of a process which will:

(a) Foster relationships among participants (i.e. to create a learning community)
(b) Enable participants to access and share their experiences and reflections on the topic/issue.
(c) Offer participants insight, expertise, knowledge or skills to complement their existing knowledge or skills.
(d) Enable participants to build on their experience so that they can engage more purposefully and creatively in their own context.

Similarly, chapter 5 describes a process which puts the centrality of people's experience at the heart of the digital story-telling approach.

PURPOSE, PEOPLE AND PROCESS

The proverb says that "a threefold cord is not easily broken." When we are working with a group, we are attending to the weaving together of three different threads. These threads are purpose, people and process.

The purpose element is primarily about the task the group is undertaking, the results they want to achieve, the goals they want to reach. For example, members of a group may want to become more competent, confident and committed facilitators, or a group may want to develop a plan, or resolve a conflict.

The people element is concerned with creating a learning community where each member of the group experiences a sense of security (physically and psychologically), a sense of solidarity (building supportive relationships among people, recognising shared purpose) and a sense of significance (everyone has a contribution to make, a part to play) [7]. In order to create a sense of community within the group we need to support people to discover who they are in this context, and who others are in the group with them.

Chapter 2 explores the approach taken by Liverpool World Centre to creating a safe space for the work of the group.

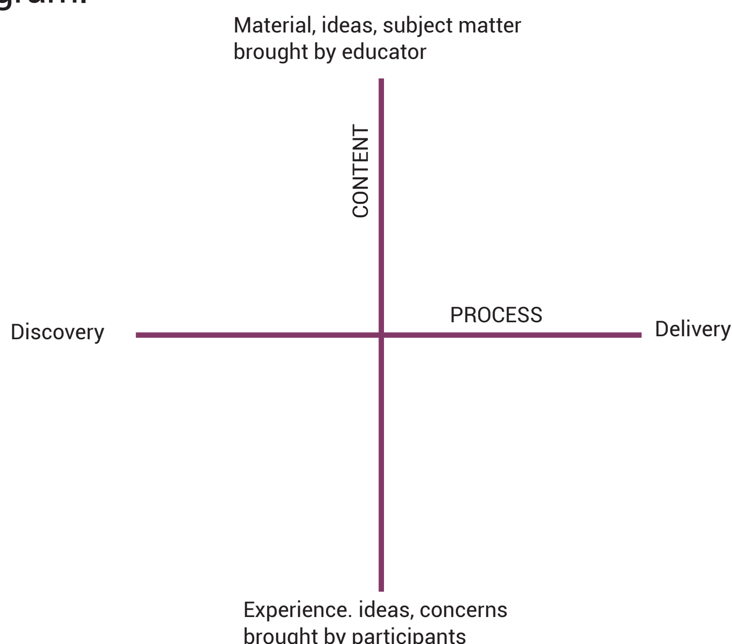
The process element is about creating and using a range of methods and means to ensure that the purpose and people elements are attended to in a synergistic way. It is concerned with achieving the task and building a mutually supportive group.

The challenge for the facilitator or participatory educator is to develop a process which enables creation of a learning community that can fulfil its purpose.

CONTENT AND PROCESS ACTION QUADRANTS

Kurt Lewin, a seminal thinker in the field of group work and experiential learning, is credited with coining the term group dynamics. In our work with groups we point this out and ask why he used the term group dynamics and not group mechanics. In answering, people speak of mechanics as suggesting a machine with moving parts which can be controlled or switched on or off. They also mention predictability, linearity, inputs and outputs, and something needing an external source of energy. Dynamics on the other hand suggests something that is unfolding, growing organically, interacting, unpredictable, ever-changing and having an internal energy source.

This often leads on to an exploration of how an educator or facilitator leading a learning group can be flexible and adaptable to the dynamics that occur in all groups.
One way of thinking about this is to look at the actions in which an educator or facilitator is likely to engage when interacting with a learning group. These are explored by making use of a simple diagram.



In a learning group there is always content. At one end of the vertical line this is shown as material, ideas, subject matter brought by the educator, and at the other end as experience, ideas and concerns that the participants bring. There is also process. This is shown on the horizontal line as delivery at one end and discovery at the other.

In the top right quadrant an educator is in delivery mode offering content. This can take the form of a lecture or a short input, a presentation, a case study, research findings. The emphasis is on what the educator knows and considers important, and the purpose is to transmit ideas or information.

In the top left quadrant the content is still what the educator brings, but the process is about discovering what participants make of this material. The educator is probing to see if what is presented is clear, comprehensible and coherent. The educator is curious to know how participants feel about this content, if it resonates with them, makes sense, strikes them as relevant.

In the bottom left quadrant the content is the experience, ideas, knowledge and concerns brought by the participants. Here the educator is inquiring, eliciting, and helping the participants to articulate and reflect on what they have experienced and what they have learned from that experience.

In the bottom right quadrant the content is still the experience, knowledge and ideas brought by the participants. But the educator moves from inquiry and discovery to delivery, helping participants to build on their experience. This may take the form of an educator offering advice, guidance, mentoring or helping participants plan actions. An educator may also invite participants to make connections between their experience and ideas with insights that the educator offers.

An example may help here. Recently we worked with a group on the topic of conflict. We began in the bottom left quadrant by inquiring into their experience of conflict. We did this by using physical movement and by exploring what the word conflict evoked for them. We also elicited stories of conflict from the participants using a worksheet. The sheet asked them not only to describe the conflict but to analyse it as well. They shared their stories in pairs.

We then moved to the top right quadrant and gave a short input on different conflict styles.

We shifted over to the top left quadrant to check with participants if the presentation was clear and if the ideas expressed were coherent and understandable.

Next came a movement to the bottom right quadrant where we invited participants to revisit their conflict experience in the light of the material presented. We offered them support in thinking through ways in which the material might illuminate their own experience and reflection and create other possibilities and options for action. Of course, the session was not linear as is suggested here. For example, during the presentation people returned to their experiences and stories and where appropriate, we shifted from delivery mode to discovery and inquiry mode. Our point is that we tried to respect the energy in the group and where it was going in a purposeful way rather than programme everything inflexibly.

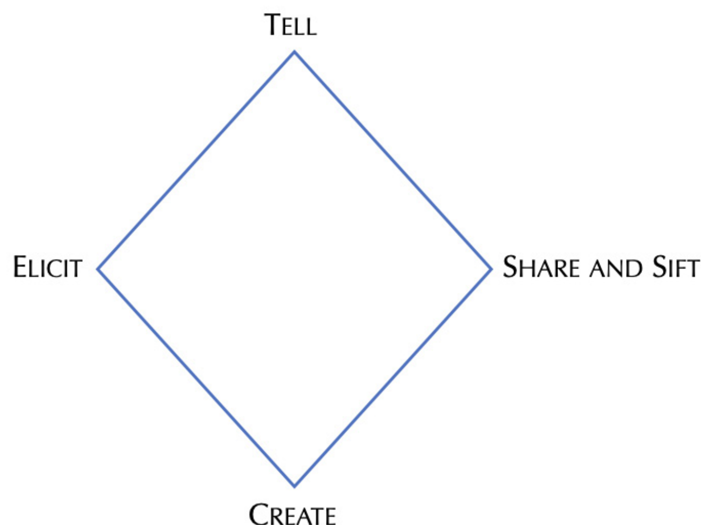
We have found this framework useful in planning sessions. How will we sequence the event? Will we begin with delivery of our own material or discovery of participants' experiences? What methods will we use in each quadrant? How will we allocate the time available?

We have also found it useful in guiding our responses as educators during events, learning how to move fluidly and skilfully between the quadrants as the session unfolds.

THE STORY DIAMOND [8]

"Storytelling reveals meaning without committing the error of defining it".
Hannah Arendt

Stories abound in our work with groups, organisations and communities. We strive to be purposeful in the way we use stories. We see four different but interconnected elements. Stories are told, elicited, shared and sifted, and created. The Story Diamond captures our way of working with stories. For each point on the diamond, Telling, Eliciting, Sharing and Sifting, and Creating, we think it is important that educators be clear about their purpose (What am I trying to do? What is my intention?) and method (how am I going to enable that?)



Telling

We as educators tell stories for different purposes and in a variety of ways. We might tell a story to encapsulate how an idea was put into practice in a particular context. Many ideas become easier to grasp when illustrated by a concrete example. We use stories to illustrate and to impart information. Stories can be used to validate people who question the worth of their own experience. We avail of stories to get people thinking, to challenge perspectives, to generate discussion, to uncover assumptions and beliefs. We sometimes tell a story which acts as "bait", to capture another story.

When we tell stories we use different media. We tell stories in an oral fashion. We also offer stories in the form of poems, written stories, short dramas, pictures, video clips. Many of the stories we use are codes in a Freirean sense. A code is a piece of problem posing material designed to represent to people in an accessible and focused way a theme about which they have strong feelings. This enables them to engage with the issues and take action.

Eliciting

We elicit, evoke and seek to discover stories from the people we work with. We do so because embedded in these stories are people's values, beliefs, practices, experiences, struggles and solutions. We want people to get in touch with their stories and to articulate them. We want them to ground themselves in their unique experience and to value their perspective. By inquiring into people's stories we are showing our interest in their lives, demonstrating that we value their experiences. For some people the request for a story is a validation of them, an indication that someone is interested in them and finds them interesting.

When we elicit stories we often use simple questions, “tell us about a time when…”, or worksheets which focus on a particular topic or theme and ask a series of questions. We use other stories, pictures or poems as prompts to evoke people's stories. **This is like story “bait”: we use a story to catch another story.** When asking for stories we invite people to be concrete, to include details, feelings, intentions, nuance, context. We encourage people to avoid abstractions. For example we are likely to ask “Tell us about a time you dealt with conflict well?” rather than “What qualities or skills do you have that help you deal with conflict?”; “Tell us about a time your community was at its best” rather than “What is good about your community?”

Sharing and Sifting

We encourage people to share stories. We do this because it promotes understanding between people, it builds relationships. The telling of a story is often a validating and enhancing exercise for people. They realise that they have a unique experience and perspective. It strengthens their identity. As stories are told, people are sharing information, but also themselves. Insights are generated, assumptions are challenged, perspectives are altered.

After stories have been shared, we invite people to sift them, to stand back and look at the stories in a reflective way. Are there patterns in the stories? Are there commonalities, differences, turning points? We ask people to consider whether the stories are life giving or alienating, if they contain seeds of hope or are likely to de-energise?

This sharing happens in an atmosphere of mutual respect and gentle curiosity. Creating this kind of space is dealt with elsewhere in this guide.

Creating

We work with people in creating stories. These are often future oriented and have a visionary quality. They are the stories people would like to live out as individuals, groups, organisations or communities. Though they are in the future, they are rooted in people's experience, and are often an amplification or a growing of themes or trends already present in people's lives. We also get people to create stories for fun. These stories can be created by using a variety of method: orally, using incomplete sentences, drawing and painting, drama, movement, photographs, words.

These elements of the story-telling diamond all feature in the approach to digital story telling described in chapter 5. The starting point may vary, but the essence is similar.

DIVERSE PURPOSES, DIVERSE METHODS

We begin this section with two stories which illustrate something of our approach in choosing methods for a particular event for a particular group.

A number of years ago, there was a Training for Transformation course based in a community in a large town in Ireland. The course took place over a number of months. The group was diverse, including residents of a local community, workers in community projects and government workers. Among the community residents were a number of people with recognised learning disabilities. Their presence, with their experience and perspectives was a significant resource to the group, as well as posing some interesting challenges. One person working in a statutory role in the community voiced how challenged she felt to be learning alongside people with a learning disability, that they could be learning in the same group. It challenged her sense of herself, of people with learning disabilities, and of the relationships between them.

One woman in the group who had a learning disability, from the start of the course often dressed as a young girl, including with her hair in bunches. She participated well, and brought a very youthful energy to the group. One day, as an energiser and a preliminary to an exercise to explore team work and cooperation, we had our own version of "The Lyrics Board", a quiz game which involved creativity, singing, and some knowledge of song lyrics. During that exercise, this woman emerged as something of a star. She knew many song lyrics, and sang well. She helped her team to win by a substantial margin. She experienced herself as knowledgeable, talented and an asset to the team, as did her team mates. Looking back, this appeared to be a turning point in the way she engaged with the course. It was as if she had found her voice in the group. She began to share more of her thoughts. And as the months went by, there was a marked transformation in her physical appearance. She began to dress and do her hair as the woman she was, rather than as a young girl.

One might be tempted to think of this as serendipitous: we just happened to create an energiser which had this effect. We had no way of knowing how significant it would be for this individual. But **it is the very fact that we use such a variety of methods, as well as creating a friendly learning environment, which increases the chances for such "serendipity".**

A second example also relates to a piece of work with a group over some months. An established group of parents of children with special needs had gone through a crisis when the group all but collapsed, and a new committee stepped up after most of the outgoing committee stepped down because of being overwhelmed by the task. The new committee invited us to work with them to find a positive way forwards.

Over a series of meetings the committee and the wider membership group gained greater clarity about their vision, beliefs and values, about the activities they wanted to engage in, about how they organised themselves, and about how they would attend to relationships, both with other groups and organisations and with each other. This last became a priority. There was a growing awareness of discontent among some of the members, and a feeling of overwhelm among committee members.

A process was designed, drawing on the work of David Kantor, and Dialogix in the UK. The method used was carefully selected for the needs of the particular group at that particular time, and designed around the limited time available. As parents of children with special needs, time was always at a premium.

The method used was a dialogue process. After briefly introducing the idea of dialogue, with an input on four dialogue practices, the group present was organised into three groups [9]. The first group was the committee (who had been meeting for their work, and to prepare for the meetings with the wider membership). The second was formed of parents of younger children, and the third was parents of older children/adults with special needs. While there was overlap between these groups, each individual opted for the group they most wanted to speak from.

There were then three rounds of speaking and listening, with the invitation to speakers to speak in their authentic voice, and to listeners to listen openly, suspending any certainties or judgements they might have about what they were hearing, as well as noticing the impact of what they heard on themselves as they listened.

For the first round, the committee sat in a small circle within the circle of the rest of the group. They talked to each other about their experience of being on the committee of the organisation over the previous year. When they had finished, those who were listening were invited to share the impact on them of what they had heard.

In the second round, the parents of younger children with special needs spoke of their experience of the organisation over the previous year. When they had finished, those who were listening were invited to share the impact on them of what they had heard.

The process was repeated for the third round, with the parents of older children or adults with special needs speaking of their experience.

The process allowed for some deep sharing, and greatly increased the mutual understanding of each others' experience. It created a shift in the dynamics and the relationships in the group. This was captured when someone said that it felt that the group had moved from a feeling of 'us' and 'them', to a deep understanding that "There is just "Us". There is no "They" to do anything."

In this instance we carefully selected a method for a particular event or need, for a particular group at a particular time. Our knowledge of this method was as a result of our approach of valuing diversity of theory, methods and approaches.

Over the years we have learned the value of creating a learning environment and setting learning objectives. In the first story the method used, the quiz as energiser, was primarily designed so that people would have fun together, learn a little about each other and replenish their energy. It was mainly about atmosphere and environment, creating a friendly space where people could sing and as it turns out shine! The second story had a focussed learning objective of helping people broaden their perspectives. It was primarily designed to enable people express their own experience and perspective and also hear the experiences and perspectives of others.

As it turned out, in the first story much more than was planned emerged from the exercise. A person found her voice, in more ways than one, and began to experience herself differently. And other experienced her differently and she grew as a person. In the second story, the learning objective was achieved as differing experiences and perspectives were named, heard and appreciated. This led to a strengthening of relationships and sense of solidarity with n the group.

We are emphasising three things here: clarity about purpose, having a diverse and situation appropriate range of methods and appreciating that methods, well-chosen and applied, can have an impact beyond what was anticipated.

REFLECTION AND SELF-AWARENESS

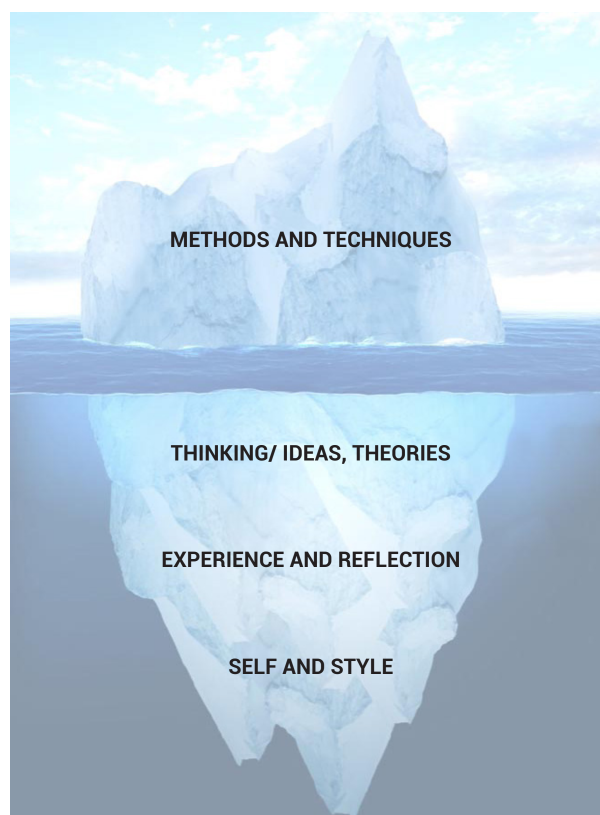
This section (Self and Style) is on the need for reflection, self-knowledge and self-awareness on the part of the facilitator/educator and the part that reflection plays in that.

SELF AND STYLE

One of the images we use during facilitation training courses is of an iceberg.

We suggest that the part of the iceberg above the waterline is akin to the methods, techniques or processes used by a facilitator. They are visible to both facilitator and participants. They are the tools of the trade, the methods we use to do our work. They can be demonstrated and observed, and people can take them and use them in their own work.

Just under the waterline are the ideas, theories, insights that shape the way we see the work. This part of the iceberg represents our thinking, our perceptions and our analysis of what is needed and what might be useful responses. Our thinking guides the methods we choose. It is not immediately visible but can be expressed and explained. Indeed, we point out that if asked, one should always be able to explain the thinking behind the use of a particular method or process. Methods and processes are not randomly chosen, they are picked or designed because they are apt and suitable for a purpose.



Below this is our experience and our reflection on our experience. Here we are referring to the facilitator's experience and the learning accrued from that experience. It is an ability to recognise patterns, recurring themes, signposts; the capacity to see each piece of work as both new and somehow familiar. Much of this can be tacit, intuitive and instinctive. But it is honed by the four kinds of reflection we referred to earlier in describing the meta-frame (see page 7).

At the base of the iceberg we put self and style. This is about self-awareness and self-knowledge, an understanding of one's strengths and frailties, values, beliefs, biases, identities. It is the realisation that who I am impacts on the group every bit as much as what I do [10].

We suggest that **we are most effective when there is congruency between the four levels of the iceberg.** If I use participatory methods then I must be familiar with the thinking behind them and I must value participants' experiences and contributions. If there is a mismatch between what I profess and what I practise the disharmony becomes obvious. It is not uncommon for us to hear of examples where participants are told that their ideas, skills and experiences are central to a programme, but then the methodology they experience, based predominantly on the delivery of information, belies these claims.

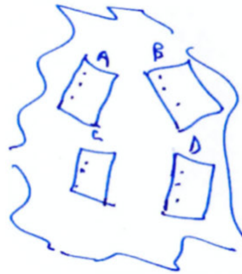
A question we often put to facilitators and educators is "How will people experience you?" We use the question to help people reflect on and articulate their style as educators or facilitators. We refer to the etymological roots of the word education. There are two different Latin roots of the English word education [11]. They are "educare", which suggests training, moulding or leading to a particular conclusion and "educere", meaning to draw out. While the two meanings are quite different, they are both represented in the word education. Each word suggests a series of actions as shown in the chart below.

EDUCATE	
EDUCARE (to lead out) More emphasis on	**EDUCERE** (to lead out) More emphasis on
Speaking Offering answers Directing Demostrating Being ahead Imparting information or knowledge	Listening Posing questions Eliciting Discovering Being beside Co-creating information or knowledge

The words represent two different ways of interacting with a group. It is neither helpful or necessary to state that one must choose one style or the other. But awareness of one's dominant style and capacity to switch or balance styles is important in being responsive to a group's needs.

A second way for people to name how they interact with a group is to introduce them to what we call the style chart. This presents people with a range of options to explore.

Style Chart



1
I have a well prepared plan which worked before. I stick with the plan.

2
I have a well prepared plan but I will deviate if necessary.

3
I have a number of plans and I can switch between them as the need arises.

4
I have 3 or 4 key ideas to begin with and I will deal with things as they emerge.

5
I have sufficient skill, knowledge and experience to improvise as I engage with the group.

We use the style chart as a way of helping people see their preferred style. We place a large version of the chart on the floor and ask people to physically stand beside a style or mix of styles that reflects their usual way of working with a group. They get a chance to speak about their style and the reasons for adopting that style. They also get a chance to explore other styles they would like to develop. **Our emphasis is not on the primacy of any one style but the recognition of our preferences and the possibilities of expanding our options.**

CONCLUSION

This chapter introduced seven inter-related elements:

- The event(s) being organised.
- The group being worked with.
- The context of the work.
- The thinking (theory, ideas, frameworks) the facilitator draws on.
- The methods and skills chosen for use by the facilitator.
- Engagement in reflection.
- The facilitator's self-knowledge and awareness of their own style.

Which we, as practitioners of participatory adult learning, are mindful of and attend to in our work.

We offered ideas, information and insights on these elements. We also offered examples showing the dynamic interplay of these elements in real life situations.

FOOTNOTES

[1] *The Education Triangle was primarily developed by listening to the group. It was also informed by two articles: Rogers, A. (2004) "Looking again at non-formal and informal education – towards a new paradigm." Available at www.infed.org/biblio/non_formal_paradigm.htm and Saddington, J.(1992) "Learner Experience: A Rich Resource For Learning" in Mulligan, J. and Griffin, C. Empowerment through Experiential Learning. London: Kogan Page.*

[2] *The work of Donald Schon has been helpful in developing our thinking and practice in this area. One useful source is Smith, M.K. (2001, 2011) "Donald Schon: learning, reflection and change", The encyclopedia of pedagogy and informal education. Available at www.infed.org/thinkers/et-Schon.htm.*

[3] *The ideas here are informed by research findings in Naughton, F.J. (2002) Training for Transformation: Utopian Hope or Practical Reality, Unpublished M. Phil. Thesis, School of Education, University of Birmingham.*

[4] *The question of knowledge is central to education and learning. The work of Freire, P. (1972) Pedagogy of the Oppressed, London: Penguin has been a primary source for our work. Another informative source has been Belenky, M et al. (1997) Women's Ways of Knowing. New York: Basic Books. We found Rowland, S. (2001) The Enquiring University Teacher. Buckingham: SHRE and Open University Press, Chapter 4 very useful in linking the different forms of knowledge.*

[5] *We found the following sources helpful in thinking through the issue of authority: Heifetz. R. (1994) Leadership Without Easy Answers. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press; Obholzer, A. "Authority, Power and Leadership." In Obholzer, A. et al (2003) The Unconscious at Work. London: Routledge; Salamon, E. (1991) The AGS Commission Model. Stockholm: AGS- Instituten.*

[6] *The ideas here are informed by research findings in Naughton, F.J. (2002) Training for Transformation: Utopian Hope or Practical Reality, Unpublished M. Phil. Thesis, School of Education, University of Birmingham.*

[7] *We have taken the idea of a learning community shaped by feelings of security, solidarity and significance from the work of Clark, D. (1996) Schools as Learning Communities. London: Cassell.*

[8] *The Story Diamond resulted from our reflection on many years of storywork with individuals, groups, organisations and communities. In developing our thinking and practice we found the following helpful: Freire, Paulo. (1972) Pedagogy of the Oppressed. London: Penguin. Kearney, Richard. (2002) On Stories. London: Routledge. Kurtz, Cynthia. (2014) Working with Stories. California: Kurtz-Fernhout Publishing. Senehi, Jessica. (2002) "Constructive Storytelling: Peace Process", Peace and Conflict Studies Vol. 9 No. 2. Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, (2004) Story Guide: Building Bridges Using Narrative Techniques. Berne: Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation. Available at https://www.bundesreisezentrale.admin.ch/dam/deza/en/documents/publikationen/Diverses/155620-geschichten-handbuch_EN.pdf Thompson, Alfred. (2011) The Story Perspective - The Use of Individual Life Narratives in Understanding Development Effects and Processes. Kimmage DSC Series Research and Perspectives on Development Practice. Available at http://mural.maynoothuniversity.ie/9955/1/Alfred-Thompson.pdf*

[9] *The concept of dialogue and the four dialogue practices are drawn mainly from Kantor, D. (2012) Reading the Room: Group Dynamics for Coaches and Leaders, San Francisco: John Wiley and Sons, Inc.*

[10] *There are some useful insights on self-knowledge and self-awareness in Gilbert, J. (2005) "Self-knowledge is the prerequisite of humanity; personal development and self-awareness for aid workers." In Development in Practice 15 (1).*

[11] *We borrowed the notion of the Latin etymological roots of education from Craft, M. (1984) "Education for Diversity", in Education and Cultural Pluralism, ed. Craft, M. pps 5-56. London Falmer Press.*

CHAPTER 2

Creating safe spaces for dialogue

Creating safe spaces for dialogue

INTRODUCTION

Dialogue is an ancient concept, with the origins of the word incorporating ideas of a particular kind of discourse between two or more people in the pursuit of knowledge. **In a true dialogue all speakers are recognised as distinct thinkers, whose engagement and contributions can lead to new and shared understandings.** This is all well and good, but how can we ensure that, when attempting to facilitate productive dialogue in educational settings, all participants feel able to engage and contribute to their fullest ability?

This chapter will explore theories and methodologies that can support educators and facilitators to develop their ability to create safe spaces for dialogue, where all learners or participants are considered and included. What follows gives an overview of practice at Liverpool World Centre, and draws on a range of theoretical perspectives.

WHY DIALOGUE?

Liverpool World Centre has worked in the field of development education for twenty years. In this time they have developed a deep appreciation of the way in which dialogic methodologies can transform learning experiences, regardless of the topics being explored. We have used dialogue techniques to develop work in a range of areas, including controversial issues, extremism, sustainable development, migration, gender. This work has taken place in schools, communities and universities, with teachers, students, community leaders, academics, activists and artists.

The space and parameters in which we function as educators can have an enormous impact on the engagement of students. Traditional chalk and board methods of learning are linear and do not place enough importance on the knowledge and experience of learners. As we have discovered in Part One, finding ways to acknowledge learner experience is particularly important in the realm of adult education, where groups will include individuals with diverse life experience.

Learning spaces must be safe spaces for learners to share and explore their thinking. This means setting up "space which is collaborative, respectful and provides an opportunity for open dialogue where… people can test out their views in an open forum for critical, in-depth and respectful discussion" (Oxfam, 2018)

In the context of this project, where educators and their learners may be new to some aspects of participatory education and to the process of digital storytelling, the creation of a safe and inclusive space helps to 'level the playing field' for learners.

By attempting to create communities of learning where all participants are equally valued and heard, educators ensure that ideas can be openly explored, and that learners feel confident in voicing, changing, challenging and developing opinions. When considering the creation of "a safe space" for this, facilitators should consider not only the physical, but also the emotional and social aspects of learning. Where the foundations for participation are carefully laid by facilitators, dialogic methods can make education truly transformative.

There has never been a more important time for communities to become empowered to think critically, challenge accepted narratives and be part of a movement calling for empathy, understanding, education and compassion.

These outcomes begin with the creation a safe space for learning.

COMMUNITIES OF LEARNING AND DIALOGIC METHODOLOGIES -THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Liverpool World Centre has long used and built upon the ideas of Brazilian educator and philosopher Paolo Freire. One of the main ideas presented within his work is that both educators and learners are the subjects of education.

"the student is not the object of the teacher, in which the latter deposits all his/her knowledges and the former learns passively… both the student and the teacher mutually contribute to the construction of their understandings of the world, which makes education a dialogical, critical, reflective and polyphonic process."

Martins (2011, p69)

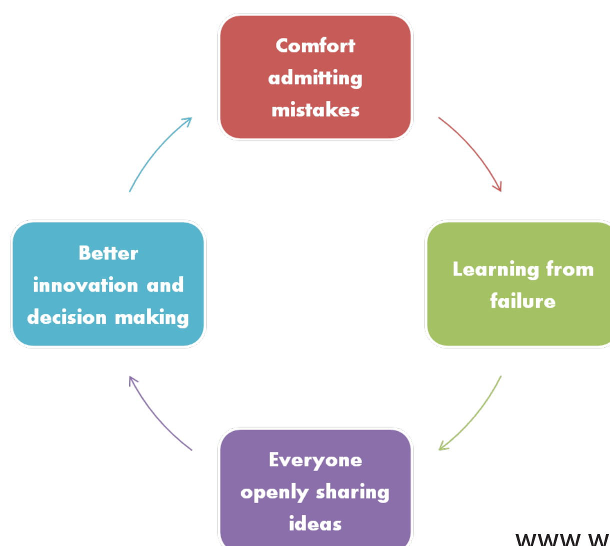
As the student is not just listened to as a gesture within the process but is placed centrally, they develop a greater sense of responsibility for and autonomy within their learning. By encouraging an open and inclusive process of learning through dialogue, educators can facilitate the development of strong group dynamics, and more open and receptive attitudes within groups of students. Delivered successfully, these outcomes link closely to the development of critical and creative thinking skills, the ability to be self aware and reflective, to communicate and co-operate, and to take informed and reflective action. Used well within educational settings, dialogue respects the autonomy of learners and inspires them to feel a stronger sense of agency within their learning.

Critical and reflective dialogue can only take place in spaces where people feel able to be honest in the expression of their thoughts, and attitudes without fear of conflict or ridicule. "A safe space demands that its occupants be open minded and attempt to empathize with others' feelings and attitudes, even those with whom they differ". (Robinson, 2015)

It is often argued that the creation of a sense of community within the learning context is key to learners' perceptions of safe space. As Clark (1996) points out "to have a sense of community is to have a place to stand (security), a part to play (significance) and a world to belong to (solidarity)." He suggests that no person can experience one of these without it affecting the other two, and that a much deeper appreciation of the potential of the community is needed.

In creating learning communities, Handy (1990) argues that a key responsibility for educators is to affirm the human worth of all those who may be engaged in the education process.

The notion of psychological safety is illustrated in the diagram below:



www.weforum.org

More traditional teaching could be said to lead to dominance of the educator, undermining the potential for more inquisitive and explorative dialogue to take place (Forghani-Arani, 2011).

The practical guidance that follows in the remainder of this chapter is concerned with developing a sense of security that enables students to play their part and feel a sense of belonging to their learning community.

COMMUNITIES OF LEARNING AND DIALOGIC METHODOLOGIES

In the following pages we will explore strategies for creating safe spaces. These strategies draw on common themes from three dialogic methodologies that have broad overlap in terms of their thinking and processes:

- Communities of Philosophical Enquiry (COPE).
- Open Spaces for Dialogue and Enquiry (OSDE).
- Philosophy for Communities (P4C).

SOURCES OF FURTHER INFORMATION ON COPE/OSDE/P4C

Communities of Philosophical Enquiry Training Module
(InterCap/Liverpool World Centre)

https://www.philosophy-foundation.org/p4c

www.thephilosophyman.com

https://www.sapere.org.uk/

https://www.academia.ed
OSDE Critical Literacy in Global Development Professional
Development Resource Pack

The initial stages of COPE, OSDE and P4C processes all take a stepped approach to the process of facilitating dialogue.

The initial stages, generally called "Getting Set" or "Preparation", involve creating safe space. It is also important however for facilitators to consider strategies for sustaining safe space throughout any given learning process, and to consider the role of evaluation and reflection in allowing people to reflect critically and honestly on their learning journeys.

OSDE, P4C and COPE all use a process of using stimulus, giving space and time to consider and share ideas, posing open questions and reflecting well. All three methodologies grow out of three basic assumptions (succinctly outlined within OSDE):

1 All Knowledge comes from a context

2 All Knowledge is partial and incomplete

3 All Knowledge can be questioned

Images from OSDE Critical Literacy in Global Citizenship Education Professional Development Resource Pack (Centre for the Study of Local and Global Justice/Global Education Derby).
Images by Alexandre Dubiela. www.dubiela.com

Martins (2011) notes that "these three principles are essential to the establishment of the open space as a truly open space is only possible when its participants share the paradigm that all knowledges are equally valid within the space". The negotiation of these principles within every group worked with is an essential starting point (explored below under "Setting Ground Rules").

Important also to all three methodologies is the role of teacher or tutor as facilitator. The expected role of the facilitator may vary depending on the learners - factors such as age, academic ability, required learning outcomes may affect how the facilitator chooses to see their role.

THE ROLE OF FACILITATOR

The roles of the facilitator within these methodologies might include:

- To guide.
- To enable.
- To challenge.
- To problematise.
- To support.
- To step back.
- To remain impartial (or conversely, play “devil’s advocate”).

The facilitator should, as far as possible, put in place the best conditions from the outset and regardless of the anticipated length of the engagement with learners. It is worth noting that, generally, the ideal atmosphere for open discussion and engagement is built over time, however this is not to say that the methods are not applicable to one off training sessions or short courses.

THINKING SPACE

Do you agree that a safe space requires...

- A space with agreed rules between students and facilitator.
- Respecting others opinions, questioning opinions not judging people.
- Most of the ideas coming from the group not the facilitator.
- Valuing all questions.
- Accepting that there might be more than one ‘right answer’.

THE STEPS

All of the above mentioned methodologies involve similar steps in their processes. These steps can be expanded further, but will include:

1. Preparation or “Getting Set”.
2. Preparing and sharing a stimulus.
3. Time for thinking and reflecting on the stimulus.
4. Creating and Choosing questions.
5. Dialogue.
6. Follow Up.

It is step one above with which we are most concerned here. Preparation should include:

- Creating safe physical space.
- Setting ground rules.
- Warm Up Activities / “Icebreakers”.

CREATING SAFE PHYSICAL SPACE

Your class, group or community should sit in a circle. The room should be large enough to arrange the chairs in a circle so that all the members of the “community” can see each other and achieve eye contact with whoever is speaking. The group should also be able to hear each other clearly; therefore the acoustics of the environment need to be considered as well. Here are some other things to consider:

- Is your venue accessible and open to all?
- Is your space big enough?
- Do you have the right equipment?
- Is there space for people to work individually and in pairs/small groups?
- Is the room comfortable and secure?

SETTING GROUND RULES

Having a set of commonly agreed ground rules displayed within your learning environment is one of the most visible signs for the group that you would like to foster a student-oriented process of learning and share responsibility with them.

It can be important to negotiate and establish ground rules anew with every group you work with. It may even be necessary to revise these within a training course if a particularly difficult issue is to be discussed, or other obstacles are anticipated within a particular session.

If you decide to create ground rules, they should be visible for the group during the whole process, and re-visited at the start of every session.

"Facilitate the process in a way that all students agreed on the rules". **Remember that your role as a facilitator is limited here and that the majority of proposals should come from the group. "**Also, the equality of inputs is important at this stage, so considering all proposals and giving voice to all students is important".

"Renegotiate the rules of space to shift the role of students from being recipients of knowledge to constructors and generators of knowledge... a collective, participatory, joint endeavour to explore the object of enquiry from various perspectives"

Forghani-Arani, 2011

Ground rules could include:

- Listen to the speaker.
- Only one person to talk at a time (groups could agree a sign or an object to pass to each other, the speaker being the person holding the object).
- Think about and respond to what is being said.
- Give reasons (I disagree or agree with X because...).
- Treat everyone's contribution with respect.
- Comment on the point, not the person.
- Use appropriate language – no offensive comments.

If the word "rules" seems inappropriate with your adult learners, try to find a word that appeals to the group such as "boundaries" or "group guidelines".

CASE STUDY - SETTING GROUND RULES

At the beginning of a session/workshop, the facilitator used pre-prepared sentences with suggested "rules" or principles. For example, "I respect the opinions of other people in the group even if I disagree with them".

Sentences were used in a "fruit bowl" activity, whereby participants either agreed by standing up and exchanging seats or disagreeing and remaining seated. Rules that nobody stood up for were disregarded, or explored later in the activity in case a change of wording made them feel relevant to the group.

New sentences could also be suggested and through this process participants reached agreement about "rules" and principles for their workshop which all felt comfortable with.

WARM UP ACTIVITIES / ICEBREAKERS

A warm up activity is a simple exercise that enables facilitators to get to know their participants, and that literally "warms up" and energises your group. They are often fun, short and require little or no organisation. Good warm up and energiser activities can transform the dynamics of your sessions, setting the tone, activating participants and introducing certain topics. Above all they should create a welcoming atmosphere in your space.

Here are some examples of simple icebreaker questions:

- Describe yourself in three words.
- If you were 20% more creative what would you achieve?
- If you could trade lives with anyone for a day who would it be and why?

It can be beneficial for ice-breakers to get people moving around your space. Something as simple as the Birthday game is a good example. In this exercise, participants arrange themselves in a line from January to December, placing themselves where they think they would come according to their birthday, i.e if you are born on the first of January you would quite confidently place yourself at the beginning. As a second step, participants tell each other when their birthdays are in order to correct their place in line. **Exercises like this are excellent for getting students relaxed and talking to each other.**

Conversely, some groups might need a "warm down" to get them focused eg, all stand and sit down one by one without speaking. If two sit down at the same time everyone has to stand up again and start from the beginning.

Facilitators can also prepare some basic resources to use:

Print four pictures - one mountain, one beach, one rainforest, one desert island. Stick the pictures in each corner of your room and ask participants to choose where they would want to be stuck for a month, unable to leave. Once students have decided, ask volunteers to explain their choices. Once someone from each corner has explained their choice, give participants the option of moving, and ask anyone who does move why they have chosen to do so. This type of activity is easy to adapt for any given topic and question. If groups are starting really "cold", yes/no questions can be used initially ("no" at one end of the room and "yes" at the other), with the questions developed and explanations elicited as group dynamics are built.

ACTIVITY - ANYONE WHO

This activity is useful for participants to start bonding without putting too much pressure on individuals to speak. All participants sit in a circle of chairs with one person standing in the middle (usually this is the facilitator to help start things off). The person in the middle makes a statement beginning with 'anyone who..., for example "anyone who has a dog". Anyone the statement applies to (in this case people who have dogs) stands up and tries to find a new seat (including the person in the middle) as quickly as possible. There will always be one person left in the middle and that person then makes another "anyone who" statement. This is repeated for as long as you want the game to continue.

ACTIVITY - ONE TRUTH ONE LIE

This activity provides a frame for storytelling while also letting the group share some information about themselves. Each member of the group (randomly or in order of the circle) introduces their name and makes two statements about themselves, one being the truth and one a lie (not true): For example “My name is John and I have a pet snake. My name is John and I had toast for breakfast”.

If the group and individuals feel comfortable to do so they may challenge the participant and ask additional questions to see if the participant can elaborate their “story”. Participants then vote on which of the two statements they believe to be true.

Ensure participants choose carefully what they say and do not feel under pressure to say something they are uncomfortable with.

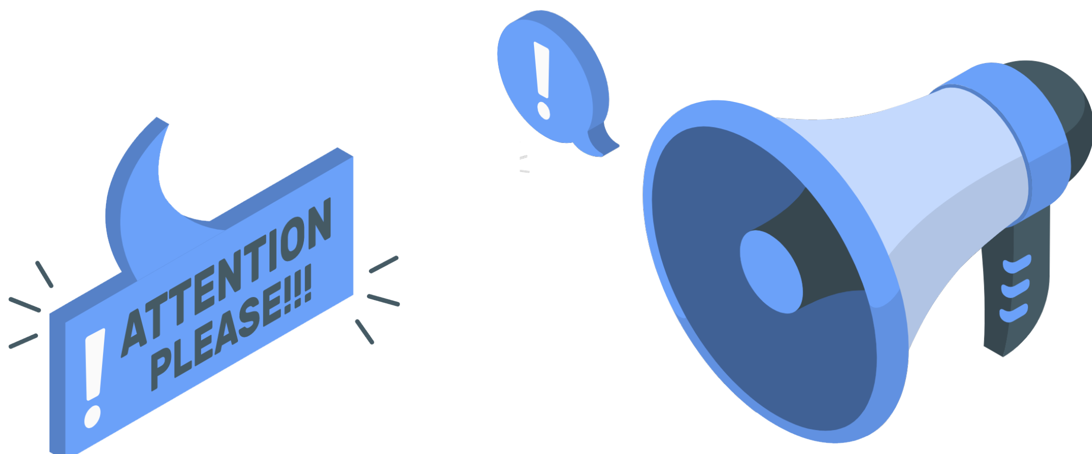
Re-visiting warm up activities at the start of each session, or after breaks, is useful in re-energising participants and welcoming people back into the workshop. Facilitators may find that groups that are well established or comfortable need less of these “energisers”.

You can find lots more warm up games and energisers online. Here are some starting places:

https://www.thoughtco.com/warm-ups-for-lesson-plans-31649

https://www.sessionlab.com/library/energiser

https://www.managementcentre.co.uk/5-energisers-for-team-meetings-and-away-days/



MAINTAINING A ‘SAFE PLACE’

Possessing a diverse toolbox of methods to reach out to different types of learners is important for facilitators. A useful simplified model is the notion of four different learning styles, originally from Howard Gardner's research into multiple intelligences (1993). In short, four over-arching learning styles are put forward:

- **The visual learner** has a preference for visual learning is partial to seeing and observing things, including pictures, diagrams, written directions and more.

- **The auditory learner** tends to learn better when the subject matter is reinforced by sound. These students would much rather listen to a lecture than read written notes, and often use their own voices to reinforce new concepts and ideas.

- **The kinaesthetic learner** or “tactile” learner learns through experiencing or doing things. They might act out events or use their sense of touch to understand concepts.

- **The reading/writing learner** learns through words on the page. While there is some overlap with visual learning, these types of learner are drawn to expression through writing and reading.

Varying your delivery in order to accommodate these different types of learner can ensure that engagement is encouraged, inspired and maintained. Additionally, different types of activity allow for individual thinking and pair/small group work. This enables those less comfortable speaking out in whole group activities to have time to consider, talk and process, and to participate as fully as those who are more confident speaking openly and publicly.

SUMMARY

An awareness of dialogic methodologies can support facilitators to create spaces in which learning participants are placed centrally to the whole learning process, and where **students feel safe to voice, discuss, and change their opinions in partnership with other learners**. The various dialogic methodologies mentioned above share common features in terms of the steps facilitators should take in order to support this process.

The consideration of space, mutually agreed guidelines, and group dynamics are all key themes in the preparation steps used by practitioners of dialogic methodologies, but moreover can usefully form the basis not only of particular group dialogues, but of a variety of training courses and learning journeys. These steps, when taken in a considered manner, can allow adult educators to deliver engaging, purposeful and transformative work with their learners.

CHAPTER 3

Faithful and Holistic Adult Learning

Faithful and Holistic Adult Learning

INTRODUCTION

For the past 18 years, Liverpool Community Spirit has been developing and delivering holistic adult learning programmes to engage the whole person, spirit, soul and body. Inspired by the great city of Liverpool's diverse and historic faith and cultural community heritages, we have drawn upon their wealth of wisdom traditions in designing those programmes. Our focus is encouraging personal development and wellbeing amongst adults who have experienced marginalisation through a combination of various factors: addictions; poor mental health; social isolation; offending behaviours and learning difficulties.

Our experiences have served to strengthen our original conviction that for learning to be effective and transformative, it is helpful to reach out to and engage the whole person, spirit, soul and body. This presents many challenges, especially when faced with the Western, secular, Social Science frameworks within which adult learning continues to be conceived and delivered by mainstream established institutions. The most visible of these challenges is a widespread and deeply ingrained fear or suspicion of anything that smacks of "religion" or "indoctrination". This is often rooted in past memories of various forms of religious oppression and intolerance, recently revived by the global re-emergence of intolerant, violent and fanatical forms of religion. Faith phobias are further exacerbated by a reactionary rise in secular Humanist fanaticism and the long established French and North American traditions of separating state (education) and religion.

One of our main practical concerns is the lack of input from faith traditions into the conception, philosophy and practice of education. This can have serious implications in terms of learner engagement and inclusivity. In our particular context of participatory, transformational learning and storytelling in adult education, it is helpful to be aware of the limitations of the 20th century Western secular social-science driven frameworks within which they are conceived. This can increase the effectiveness of those methodologies in meeting the needs and challenges of our increasingly multi-faith communities.

For example, Paulo Freire's popular and ground-breaking "Pedagogy of the Oppressed" (Freire 2005) has inspired many education programmes. It is firmly rooted in Western, secular Enlightenment tradition (filtered through Hegelian and Marxist dialectics and North American philosophers William James, John Dewey and Erich Fromm) traceable back to the 18th century Western Enlightenment philosopher Rousseau. It is an essentially rationalist, pragmatic, secular humanist world view, which elevates the individual self (conceived as essentially good and rational, but subject to and oppressed by negative socio-political/religious forces from which it needs to be liberated) as the centre, source and arbiter of all meaning, value and purpose in life. This world view includes the Protagorean assumption that Man is the measure of all things. It tends to imply that traditional, authoritative, objective conceptions of truth, meaning and reality (as found in many world faiths) are, as such, necessarily oppressive, false or 'inauthentic'.

The noble aim of Freire's pedagogy lies in its attempts to develop the learner's consciousness of hidden assumptions and power structures that, in a sense, colonise and oppress the learner and then to empower that learner to be an active participant in, rather than passive, oppressed recipient of, a truly liberating learning process. Such consciousness is seen as endowing each learner with the awareness, vision and ability to actively transform their individual and their communities' lives.

We would argue that the effectiveness of this noble aim is greatly increased when any pedagogy of the oppressed and any methodologies of participatory learning and story-telling are themselves liberated from limited (and often limiting and excluding) Western secular Social-Science driven frameworks. This would enable them to embrace more holistic understandings of the human person/condition, as contained within the faith traditions lived out in our multi-faith communities. This is particularly relevant for any education programme declaring itself to be inter-cultural, transformative, and facilitating. Such a declaration may assume an air of apparent objectivity that can blind itself (and its participants) to critical awareness of its own assumptions and power structures. Thereby, that noble aim of liberating learners' minds through a process of "facilitation" could slip into an alternative form of Western secular colonising of minds. Such colonisation would represent an imposition of restrictive Western secular Social Science driven norms of the good, just, happy and fulfilled (or their 20th century Western, secular equivalents: "liberated", "awakened", "authentic") person and community. Equally, any so-called "facilitating" and "elicitive" methodologies would merely constitute a more subtly disguised process for imposing those Western, secular, norms upon learners.

HOLISTIC UNDERSTANDINGS OF THE WORLD

Global and Development education programmes tend to define, categorise, discuss and facilitate key concepts such as social justice, human rights, culture, values, and human needs within Western, secular Social Science frameworks.

These often have great validity and value in themselves, but they can be presented as being 'inter-cultural' means for presenting and dialoguing other world views and approaches. As such, they can assume an air of objective authority.

Adult educators aiming to engage in inter-cultural, participatory and transformative learning also may be unaware that Western, secular Humanism is the origin and foundation of UN and UNESCO's discourse on education and human rights and that this too represents a very particular Western secular philosophical world view, characterised by philosophical naturalism and relativism. This worldview, whilst claiming to uphold the value and dignity of the human individual, attempts to do so whilst rejecting the revelatory foundations of religious truth, knowledge and belief which many faith communities (and, it could be argued, John Locke, the philosophical founder of the human rights movement) regard as essential for philosophically and practically upholding any human rights agenda. It also limits conceptions of the reality of humanity (and our world) to purely natural forms and elevates man (above God) to be the ultimate source and measure of all value and supreme sovereign master of his own destiny. Again, this world view may be valid and should be taught and understood. However, it should not assume an authoritative role as the "objective" or "neutral" framework for presenting and dialoguing all other world views.

The presence and presumptuousness (with respect its assumption of objectivity, neutrality and its framing of religions and people of faith) of the Western secular social scientific frameworks for inter-cultural/faith education programmes can be

illustrated by a different perspective on the Indian story of the elephant brought before a group of blind men by an all-wise King. Each blind man grasps onto a different part (tail, trunk, leg, ear, belly, etc.) of the elephant and falsely assumes that he has perceived and understood the nature of the whole animal. The story is often presented as a critique of any attempt on behalf of any particular faith or philosophy to lay claim to the whole Truth. But, of course, the deeper presumption lies in those who identify with the all-seeing King who presumes to know, with imperial, absolute certainty, that what each man grasps is just a different part of the entire picture which only he, the mighty all-wise King, can see.

SENSITIVELY INCLUDING WORLD FAITHS

The most common negative stereotype we encounter amongst learners from Western, secular backgrounds are that religions are inherently irrational ("Science is the only source of sound knowledge") and troublesome ("Religions just cause endless conflicts, wars, exploitation of women and children"). Some still cling to the hopes of, for example, the Darwinian eugenicists and secular humanists Brock Chisholm and Julian Huxley (co-founders and first Directors of the UN World Health Organisation and UNESCO respectively) that religions would die out as humanity evolved into their Western secularist vision of the rational, self-enlightened humanist. However, given the subsequent persistence and even resurgence of religion, a second common stereotype emerges, according to which religions/faiths can be acceptable if they are merely subjective individual life-style choices or "spiritualities". Likewise, Western secular social scientific frameworks of education, having abandoned hopes of dismissing or eliminating religions, may seek instead to present and dialogue them in a tamed and emasculated form as multi-variable, culturally relative expressions of humanity's 'spiritual dimension'.

Unfortunately, this distorts the nature of some of the most widely practiced, traditional forms of religion, which tend to make universal and absolutist claims about what is true, real, knowable, just and good.

Those religions appeal to that aforementioned source of knowledge and truth that they regard as absolutely vital for establishing a more objective understanding of all aspects of life and reality. This is divine revelation ("wahi" in Islamic tradition). Whilst theologians (e.g. Thomas Aquinas and Al Ghazali) have wrestled to define the exact relationship between faith and reason, most agree that there is a fundamental and foundational choice to be made in terms of where ultimate authority in these matters

lies. It can be presented as boiling down to the choice between, on the one hand the aforementioned Protagorean claim that "Man is the measure" (in which the human self reigns supreme) and on the other hand, the claim of mainstream Abrahamic traditions, expressed as "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" (according to which the omnipotent, omnibenevolent, creator God reigns supreme).

Our experience has taught us that a more honest and productive means to facilitating inter-faith/cultural understanding and dialogue, is for religions to be presented in their own terms, rather than through secular Social Science frameworks that present them as forms of culture, subjective value systems, different expressions of a universal human "spirituality" and so on. However, one must always be wary that such presentations could quickly slide into deceptive and oppressive forms of proselytisation or da'wah. Religions, without exception, have a strong urge to convert (Judaism often claims exception here, but its history of proselytising only ended with respect to conversion into the Jewish community, but not with respect to its world views which can be as absolutist as other global faiths). How is it possible to learn about and from religions (which have such valuable insights to share and which is such a vital process for promoting an inclusive and cohesive society at all levels) without a reversion to oppressive and authoritarian forms of religious indoctrination?

The following sections will explore means for embracing a more holistic and inclusive approach, the potential of which has been tested through our 18 years of practical experience in the field of inter-cultural/faith adult learning, in our local community and prisons. At the heart of this approach is the use of stories and traditional understandings of hospitality.

INITIAL ENCOUNTERS: OPENING THE HEART TO OTHER PERSPECTIVES

To seek to ensure a more holistic and inclusive approach to inter-cultural, transformative learning, we adapted a framework of classical hospitality, defined in its original sense of "love of the stranger", in which learners and facilitators are encouraged to open their hearts and minds to those people and viewpoints that appear strange to them. The framework is grounded in a universal value common to all faiths and many secular traditions too. It is presented at the start of our programmes with an exercise of reflecting upon the story of Abraham (a.k.a. Avram, Ibrahim) and the three strangers who appear at his tent in the desert (Genesis 18:1-10). To

enhance learner participation, the story can be easily dramatised (we have written and delivered our own adaptation of the story accessible to our learners) in order to elicit the important principle of Abraham as an exemplar of hospitality, which is made more explicit in Jewish, Christian and Islamic commentaries upon the revealed texts. Having introduced the famous maxim. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares [Hebrews 13.2], learners [1] are invited to provide examples of occasions when something valuable has been or could be missed out on by closing off their mind and heart to that which appeared at first strange to them. This encourages a spirit of humility and openness to the other and a sense that encountering difference and diversity can be a great blessing.

It also creates an ideal foundation for participatory learning and sharing in which everyone is encouraged to contribute because what each brings to the table is presented as a blessing to all. Hospitality practices such as greetings, welcoming into a home and provision of foods and drinks, form a wonderful gateway for learners to explore, appreciate and begin opening hearts and minds to a very wide range of diverse faiths and cultures in an ethos of friendship and respect. We have found that this immediately impacts on the inevitable presence of negative fears, phobias and misunderstandings that cause us to close our minds and heart to “the other.” It is particularly applicable with respect to faith phobias. Examples include age-old anti-Semitism (still pervasive in Western secular cultures and prevalent in many Muslim communities) and the rising tides of Islamophobia and Christianphobia. The latter is often more hidden (and thereby often less understood, confronted and discussed), receiving not as much main-stream media and educational coverage.

To help combat such faith phobias, we introduced each faith through engaging learners in their respective traditions of hospitality as presented by local community practitioners of those faiths. Examples of this are given in the sections below.

It is worth mentioning here another issue that we have encountered in our British multi-cultural context, which other European adult learning organisations may also experience. Some facilitators and learners in their keenness to embrace and demonstrate an inter-cultural, global ethos, thereby may consciously or unconsciously neglect their own indigenous cultural and faith heritage. After decades of seeking to expose and reject the negative, colonial, oppressive and racist legacies of (in our context) British culture, Christian religion and history, some may close their minds (and adult educational coverage) to that culture and Christianity in its entirety. Such cultural and spiritual deracination opens a dangerous vacuum for a variety of extremist (e.g. Far Right) groups to fill that space with their exclusivist and excluding visions of British culture and identity. As Marcus Garvey famously said: *A people without the knowledge of their past history, origin and culture is like a tree without roots.* Another wise saying, by Malcom X, could also be applied in this (very different from its original) context: *You can't hate the roots of the tree without ending up hating the tree. You can't hate your origin without ending up hating yourself.*

To help address this issue, we include comprehensive sections engaging learners in exploring some positive aspects of ancient British Christian culture and faith. Examples include examining the lives of positive, inspirational role models such as St Patrick, St. David and St. George, exploring the transformational virtues they manifested in overcoming life's challenges and then applying them to contemporary challenges to our personal and community wellbeing and welfare.

HOLISTIC APPROACHES TO THE PERSON: SPIRIT, SOUL AND BODY

To help provide a more holistic and inclusive approach to exploring the nature of the person, it can be productive to stimulate dialogue through foundational questions such as What am I? Where have I come from? Where am I now? Where am I going to? and 'How do I get there? These will underlie (implicitly if not explicitly) any process of personal and social transformation or development. Indeed, these questions are so fundamental to understanding and exploring the human condition that they are a helpful framework for including non-religious world views as well (and for dialogue, discussions and gaining comparative perspectives).

In our Taste of Life programme for marginalised adults, we begin facilitating an appreciation of faith perspectives on personal identity, through exploring the ancient Buddhist story of the Man with Four Wives [2]. Following a discussion as to who the fourth wife might be, learners make a paper boat which illustrates three elements of personal identity, namely, body, soul and spirit - which are common to many faith traditions (see pictures below).

Learners record their names on the bow of the boat which, together with sail, anchor, mast (i.e. the physically sensible elements) represent their body. The simple drawing of the sailor with two arms, one going to the rudder and one to the boat's mast, represents the soul. Following discussions about how to define the soul, learners are introduced to a common tripartite view of the soul as follows:

First: “thoughts"/"thinking": learners write one of those words across the sailor's head.

Second: “feelings"/"emotions", writing one of those words inside the arm that is in touch with the bae of the mast and the top of the hull.

Third: “choice"/"choosing", either word written inside the arm that holds the rudder. It may be necessary here to clarify the meaning and function of a rudder and help learners make the link between that role and the process and role of choices in our daily lives.

Next, following a group discussion as to what the “spirit” of a person might be (aided by examples of how the word “spirit” is commonly applied in every day use in relation to a place, a sports team, a community, etc.), learners begin to appreciate the traditional monotheistic understanding of the spirit as the central motivating and directional force that moves/drives a person (place, team, community etc.). It is often helpful to reveal that the root of the Jewish, Christian and Islamic words used for spirit [ruach, pneuma/spiritus, ruh] are all identical with their respective languages’ words for wind and to explore through discussion this significance (e.g. spirit like wind is an invisible, yet powerful, ubiquitous and quickening force). Following discussion of where in a person the spirit may be located (and during which it is useful to appreciate that there is considerable variation of opinion on this matter), learners record this third personal dimension by writing ‘spirit’ within the heart shape on their boat’s sail. This exercise, if carried out sensitively can stimulate and inform other dialogues on the nature of the person, but also thereby culture, community, world views and values are handled within a framework that allows people of faith to feel more included. This enables them to share and contribute some of their key motivating and reality-grounding concepts such as God, holiness, sin, redemption, judgement/akhira, justice, love etc. At the same time, it does not alienate, or threaten participants who do not practise a religion.

Developing the boat analogy further, we ask learners to share examples of negative and positive spirits or forces within themselves that have either knocked their lives “off course” (preventing them from achieving their goals) or helped bring them back “on course” to achieve what they want to achieve. After many years working with marginalised adults (including offenders) we were able to provide five examples of the most commonly testified negative spirits with their five opposite positive spirits. These spirits are clarified and illuminated through proverbs and other wisdom sayings from faith traditions. Learners are encouraged to add others of their own choice. Following an exploration of these spirits, learners identify and record on their sails a negative one which has had a particular effect on their lives (past or present). The opposing positive spirit/force is also identified and recorded near the top of their sail. This personal paper boat can also be used to stimulate discussions about different views about goals, purpose and direction in life, which again allows space for and encourages input from those who follow a faith tradition, as well as those who do not, and allows each to better understand and appreciate where they are all coming from.

Two other uses of the boat model which we have found helpful: Firstly, following a discussion on why boats need an anchor, we move on to explore what anchors people employ to provide some stability and security during "stormy" times in their lives. Learners can then discuss, identify and record a word to express this and write it on their boat's anchor. Secondly, the boat template also has the word "conscience" written down the inside of the boat's mast. Following a discussion of the importance and role of a mast on a sailing boat, learners discuss the role of conscience in their lives, its relation to the heart of a person and the means and consequences of both damaging (or "searing") and also repairing (re-sensitising) the conscience. The boat can be used to stimulate dialogue about the relationships and connections between body, soul and spirit, the diverse opinions of different word views on this matter and their consequences in terms of ideas about behaviour, values, concepts of ultimate goals and purpose in life.

CREATING SAFE SPACES

Employing the hospitality framework mentioned above also provides a safe, open space for learners to share and explore the perspectives brought by different faiths. In our Taste of Life personal development course for marginalised adults, that framework of hospitality is expanded to include shared preparation, cooking and eating of meals taken from the different cultures, each with an associated faith. Meal preparations are interspersed with positive personal encounters with local representatives of each of the eight diverse cultural/faith traditions explored in the course. These are volunteers who have been taken on and, if necessary, trained, in order to receive and respond to any questions asked by learners about their faith without any fear of offense. In an age that combines political correctness with faith phobias, creating such spaces is vital for enabling fruitful explorations and dialogue. Our local community faith representatives are not (and are not presented as) faith experts, but simply local people who live out their faith in our community context. As such, they are able to freely admit if they cannot fully explain an aspect of their faith. **This can help learners understand and appreciate that for many (if not the majority of) faith practitioners, their faith is not always a personal life style choice, nor an intellectual theory. Often it is something that they may be born into, absorb or awakened to, without conscious choice of (and sometimes in opposition to) their individual "self".** This helps learners realise that the ultimate authority and validity of a person's faith does not always lie in the personal choice of their individual self. As already mentioned, the common unifying theme for each faith presentation and exploration is hospitality traditions, meeting and greeting, welcoming into a home and eating together (which dovetails nicely into the cooking activities).

HOME OF HOSPITALITY

To facilitate this safe space for understanding and dialogue, we have re-created traditional home living rooms where much of the cultural/faith exploration and dialogue takes place. These living rooms are furnished with traditional everyday furnishings, pictures, clothing and artefacts that might be found in the local community home of a person of that faith/cultural tradition. We entitle our workshop experiences in these venues as At Home with…[Islam, Judaism, Ethiopian Christianity, etc.]. This is an obvious play on the phrase "at home with" given that our aim is to provide an experience of being in the home and experiencing the hospitality of a local person of that faith. By the end of this experience, the learner will feel more psychologically "at home with" that person and faith community (which had previously appeared rather strange, alien and/or threatening to them).

The facilitator uses those homely furnishings and artefacts to talk about how their faith is lived out in their every day lives and to invite questions for learners who are encouraged to explore the room and handle the artefacts and ask questions about them.

When delivering our programmes in venues outside our "Home of Hospitality" (e.g. in prisons), we seek to re-create a homely, relaxed and personal atmosphere through the use of homely artefacts (carefully negotiated and agreed with the prison authorities). These can include not just religious artefacts, but also homely photographs and pictures, clothing for learners to try on, tea and coffee sets, rugs, our own crockery, pots, and, of course, music related to that culture and faith. This enables us, for example to engage prisoners in the Ethiopian Coffee ceremony, a Jewish Shabbat supper, a Chinese tea ceremony and the practice of Iftar in our Muslim communities.

In order to ensure successful learner participation and learning outcomes, the creation and utilisation of these safe spaces needs to be undertaken with full consideration and application of the principles outlined in chapter II of this Guide.

PARTICIPATORY LEARNING

To encourage interactive, participatory learning, storytelling and drama are integrated into all of our programmes activities. For example (and in addition to the Abraham drama mentioned above), in our exploration of Ethiopian Christian hospitality and beliefs, we dramatically re-enact a traditional welcome to an Ethiopian home (using our Ethiopian Orthodox living room). Two hosts welcome a stranger/visitor to their home with traditional handshakes, bowing, coffee making ceremony, offering food, washing hands (and if learners are up for it, feet: something which recently proved popular and successful in one of our prison workshops) and talking in traditional Ethiopian style with great deference and humility. This drama activity, together with artefacts such as the Ethiopian flag, prayer stick (Maquamia), frankincense, Bible stand and meskel (Ethiopian style cross], is used to explore Christian beliefs regarding the nature of the person, community, racism, core values such as humility and love for the neighbour (who is everyman). Of great importance for developing insight into the lived out faith, perspectives and heart of a Christian, these concepts are discussed through their rooting and origin in the life of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Having established a safe, homely atmosphere, learners are encouraged to dialogue and explore topics that can appear sensitive, complex or controversial such as the Christian understanding of sin, the Incarnation and the Holy Trinity (doctrines which some Western secular facilitators may not be aware lie at the heart of much Christianphobia in Muslim communities) and the role of women.

In our Jewish living room, we dramatically re-enact the welcoming in of the Shabbat by the mother of the house, blessing of bread, wine, children and include singing some traditional Jewish Shabbat songs. This leads into a dialogue with the faith representative about the family and the social and community benefits of keeping the Sabbath holy, as well as the importance of remembering/celebrating freedom and the struggle against slavery in all its various forms, physical, psychological and spiritual. The importance of food and food regulations are demonstrated with interactive activities including tasting foods and sorting kosher from and non-kosher products. Again, having established the secure, homely atmosphere, fruitful dialogues can take place around sensitive issues such as anti-Semitism as well as the role of women.

In our Muslim living room, we explore the nature of prayer and its central importance as the key regulator and orientator of life for believers. Key life events such as birth,

marriage, death and pilgrimage are explored through the personal experience of the faith representative (we are fortunate in having a Sunni Muslim on our staff who is married to a Shi'a man and therefore provides more than one perspective on each topic covered). The role of the Prophet Muhammad as exemplar and role model for every Muslim is illustrated and discussed and room furnishings offer opportunities to dialogue on topics such as use of images, music, modesty in clothing, sharia law and regulations that affect everyday life. Once again, having established a safe and secure, friendly atmosphere, learners are encouraged to ask questions and engage in dialogue issues that can appear controversial to Western secular minds, such as the role of women and the meaning of jihad, without fear of offense. Learners can try on clothing (particularly helpful when it comes to exploring various cultural forms of women's head coverings) and also re-enact aspects of welcoming a person into a home, including hand washing and the use of perfume.

All learning activities incorporate personal reflections in which learners share and record what they have learned from the diverse faith traditions that they would take to be worthwhile or helpful and applicable to their own lives and that of their communities.

PARTICIPATORY LEARNING: STORIES

Religions have a wealth of stories that effectively communicate profound wisdom and human experience. The power of storytelling as an effective means for understanding and learning is beautifully illustrated by the old Jewish story about dressing up Truth in the clothes of Story. This has been adapted into a modern tale of a beauty competition between two sisters, "Story" and "Truth" (see appendix). We incorporate this into the opening session of our Taste of Life adult learning workshops. Storytelling is particularly well-suited to opening hearts and minds to moral and spiritual perspectives and encouraging personal and group reflections, sharing viewpoints and open dialogue. It is also integral to our explorations of diverse faiths and cultural traditions, enabling learners to perceive, reflect and apply valuable life-lessons contained within each to their own personal and community circumstances.

We have found that this process often releases learners' and facilitators' fears and inhibitions and encourages them to share their own personal stories. This in turn often provides invaluable opportunities for learners to realise their (empowering and confidence-boosting) role as participator-contributors to the learning process.

Stories that we have found especially fruitful include the Chinese story of Chopsticks in which a person is granted their wish to see heaven and hell. They see they are physically identical in all respects: people sitting around a sumptuous banqueting table filled with delicious foods, each person having long chopsticks fixed to their arms above their elbows, making it impossible to bend them and thus rendering them unable to take any food to their mouths. In hell, the diners are totally focused on satisfying their own desire for food, whereas in heaven they are all feeding each other. This can stimulate fruitful dialogues and personal story sharing about prison and community life and the difference that personal attitudes make to people's daily lives and wellbeing.

The Buddhist story of Angulimala and the Oriental Orthodox Christian story of Moses the Black, both open the door to creative dialogues about transforming offending behaviour and attitudes, and avoid confining them within Western secular psychological or sociological frameworks, thereby encouraging the participation of diverse faith community perspectives and members. Enlightening wisdom stories which bring a much welcomed and beneficial elements of humour can be found in

the Islamic body of Nasruddin stories and the Jewish tales of Helm. A rich source of helpful, accessible wisdom stories from diverse faiths can be found in The Song of the Bird by Anthony De Mello (De Mello 1987). These stories can prove particularly fruitful in that they benefit from repeated examination, often bearing very different, progressively more profound and nourishing fruits each time they are revisited and discussed. For example:

SEARCHING IN THE WRONG PLACE: *A neighbour found Nasruddin on hands and knees. "What are you searching for Mullah?" "My key." Both men got on their knees to search. After a while the neighbour says, "Where did you lose it?" "At home." "Good Lord! Then why are you searching here?" "Because it's brighter here." Search for God where you lost Him.* De Mello p. 31.

It is important to be wary of presenting and exploring faith traditions and perspectives solely through isolated stories and anecdotes, 'safely removed' from their more challenging, yet authenticating religious context (with their ultimate, often absolute moral and ontological claims). Those claims often form the ultimate drivers and motivators in the life of their adherents. Therefore, adult learning programmes seeking to promote inter-personal/cultural/faith understanding (what we colloquially express as 'getting where a person/community is coming from'), will need to develop frameworks that are able to bring such claims into the open and discussed in a safe and secure manner. Storytelling elements therefore benefit from including stories from a faiths' authoritative Holy Scriptures (e.g. Torah, Bible, Qur'an, Vedas and Gita, Guru Granth Sahib, etc.) and exploring of some verses from those scriptures which are regarded by their community as foundational for their lived out faith. Examples of such stories include Abraham and the angels mentioned above, the Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10) and the story of Yusuf (Joseph) in the Qur'an (Surah Yusuf). Foundational scriptural verses we have fruitfully used include the Shema (Deuteronomy 6.4) of Judaism, which we introduce through the home

rooted practice of affixing a mezuzah scroll in a small box on the door post of every room in a house, exploring its contents and the reasons why and how it is used. With respect to Christianity we examine an Ethiopian Orthodox maquamia (prayer stick) which has two key quotes from Jesus Christ inscribed upon it which link to the physical, psychological and spiritual supportive role of the stick to that of Jesus Christ for the believer. It also facilitates an understanding of the nature and importance to believers of being "in good standing" with God.

In our exploration of Islam, we utilize some beautifully framed ayas (revelation verses) from the Qur'an, which decorate the walls of our Islamic living room, including Ayat al Kursi (we also have a large, elaborate calligraphic presentation of the Shahada). We model the Qur'an on its stand on two tables in the living room and utilise these to examine and discuss Al Fatiha, the opening verse of the Qur'an, which is recited during every Muslim prayer and functions as an ideal opening into understanding the essence of Islamic faith and practice.

Appreciating the central role of narrative in diverse faith traditions can provide an inspiring stimulus to the empowering storytelling processes outlined in chapters I and V of this Guide.

TRANSFORMATION

Faith traditions have a wealth of valuable wisdom that can contribute to and greatly enhance dialogue and practice around transformation at all levels, personal, community and global. In relation to understanding and transforming community, faiths bring concepts and approaches that are invaluable sources of light, wisdom and guidance onto any issue around development and empowerment. These include the Jewish, Christian and Islamic notions of justice, righteousness and charity and their inseparability as expressed in their words 'Tsedakah (Hebrew) and Sadakah (Arabic); the earliest Christian embodiment of Church (as expressed in the book of Acts chapter 2, verses 42-48); the earliest Islamic practice of Umma; the Sikh active social principle of sewa (with its langar); Hindu and Buddhist ideals of Sangha and the Jewish practical social values of tikkun olam and gemilut hasadim. All of these provide inspiring, rich and relevant exemplars and frameworks for exploring transformational communitarian living.

Some examples with respect to personal transformation have been provided above. In addition, **faith traditions provide valuable additional perspectives that can easily be neglected by global, developmental and transformational learning programmes conceived within Western secular, Social Science frameworks. The latter tend to perceive and present a narrowly conceived range of human needs, confining them within the categorisations of for example, Abraham Maslow or Manfed Max Neef. These tend to omit reference to spiritual needs.**

To facilitate a more holistic and inclusive approach, it would be necessary to include the perspectives and wisdom of faiths and faith practitioners (such as those concepts and frameworks just mentioned above) and their invaluable spiritual perspectives on transformation. Examples could include the following.

Firstly, transformation at a community, social and global level will always be doomed to failure and frustration if it is not first achieved on a personal level. This point is nicely illustrated by the following short story from Islamic tradition:

> *The Sufi Bayazid says this about himself; "I was a revolutionary when I was young and my prayer to God was: 'Lord give me the energy to change the world.'" "As I approached middle age and realized that half my life was gone without my changing a single soul, I changed my prayer to: 'Lord, give me the grace to change all those who come in contact with me. Just my family and friends, and I shall be content,'" 'Now that I am an old man and my days are numbered, my one prayer is, 'Lord, give me the grace to change myself.' If I had prayed for this right from the start I should not have wasted my life." (de Mello p. 174-175).*

Secondly, it is also well-illustrated in this apocryphal anecdote about the famous British Catholic writer, G.K. Chesterton:

> *The Times [of London newspaper] once sent out an inquiry to famous authors, asking them to send their answer to the question, "What's wrong with the world today?" and Chesterton responded simply,*
>
> *"Dear Sir,*
> *Regarding your article "What's Wrong with the World?"*
> *I am.*
> *Yours truly,*
> G.K. Chesterton."

A second alternative (to philosophical naturalism and secularism) perspective that faith traditions bring is that this world may not be all that there is. This can be fruitfully explored through discussing faith concepts of the afterlife (including heaven and hell and the Dharmic religions' notions of samsara, including the Buddhist wheel of life). This examination will bear less fruit (and also distract from discussing its practical consequences) unless it is connected to the accompanying fundamental notion that we could all be just passing through this world. Equally fundamental to these after-life concepts is the sobering idea that we could all be accountable for our actions and thoughts in an eternal as well as a temporal sense (as expressed in the concepts of Judgement/akhira and karma).

Gateways to exploring these perspectives could include the following:

> *A story from Jewish tradition:*
> *In the last century, a tourist from the USA visited the famous Polish rabbi, Hofetz Chaim. He was astonished to see that the rabbi's home was only a simple room with some books. The only furniture was a table and a bench. "Rabbi, where is your furniture?" asked the tourist. "Where is yours? " said Hofetz.*
> *"Mine? But I'm passing through. I'm only a visitor here. " "So am I." (de Mello p. 156).*

Exploring the Beatitudes of the Lord Jesus Christ (Matthew 5.1-12) provides insight and perspective on contemporary secular views of happiness, life purpose and goals, especially given their counter-cultural assertions that true happiness is to be found, for example, in spiritual poverty, humility, mourning, hungering and thirsting after righteousness, mercy, purity in heart, persecution and being reviled and falsely accused.

Chapter IV of this Guide points out the benefits of facilitators developing their awareness of the languages and the patterns of language use in their groups, particularly with respect to facilitating more skilful and fruitful interventions. It reveals the importance and benefits of listening out for language of the head, the heart and the hands. We would add to that the considerable benefits of listening out for the language of the spirit.

CONCLUSION

We have argued that adult learning that aims for transformation and participation of the learner will benefit from embracing the diverse, broad and deep perspectives of faith traditions. These traditions shed the invaluable light of centuries of practical wisdom upon the any issues concerning positive personal and community change. Their inclusion makes such adult learning programmes more accessible and engaging for the growing numbers of people of faith in our European communities. They also can help address the lack of awareness of our own cultural and philosophical assumptions when seeking to understand the needs of others and facilitate and empower them to address those perceived needs.

The dangerous consequences of such lack of awareness is superbly illustrated by the Tanzanian folktale of the Monkeys and the Fish, as effectively used in the excellent adult learning guidebook Partners Intercultural Companion to Training for Transformation (Sheehy, Naughton and O'Regan, 2007). These stories illustrate how such lack of awareness can turn our well-intentioned actions into highly destructive consequences for the very people we were aiming to support. A recent, practical example of this can be found in Lalibela, the unique complex of rock-hewn churches which have been a sacred place of pilgrimage for the Ethiopian Orthodox faithful for a millennia. In a recently published paper Yirga Gelaw Woldeyes (Woldeyes 2019) reveals how well-intentioned UNESCO and EU sponsored projects to preserve the physical fabric of the church complex and (with the secular government) make it more accessible for income generating tourists, all occurred without proper consultation with the local Ethiopian Orthodox Tawehedo Church authorities and faithful. This has resulted in an acceleration of their physical degradation. In addition, and even more importantly, it has disempowered and marginalised the Orthodox Church faithful who for so long up to this point have preserved and kept alive the raison d'etre of the entire complex.

In our increasingly multi-faith European communities, breaking out from Western, secular Social Science frameworks and opening hearts and minds to perspectives of “the other” (whether that “other” appears to you as an agnostic, atheist, Baha'i, Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Jew. Muslim, Pagan or Sikh) will be helpful for any project seeking to transform phobias and prejudices into positive, personal encounters. This applies locally, nationally and internationally. Drawing from our own, albeit limited experience in Liverpool, we have offered some practical suggestions as to

how to begin to include those perspectives in a respectful and enlightening manner, yet avoiding any lapse into proselytisation. **In the struggle to build a firm foundation for a truly inclusive and substantial community spirit, in our increasingly multi-faith/cultural societies, we hereby recommend adopting a more faith-full, holistic approach to adult learning in a spirit of hospitality (heart and mind opening) and humility.**

FOOTNOTES

[1] In all of the following uses of the term "learners" in the paper, as well as in our daily practice in the field, we seek to uphold Freiere's ideal that facilitators are always equally learners and should engage in and model all the activities mentioned in our education programmes.

[2] A version of this story can be found at this site https://rgyan.com/blogs/a-man-should-have-four-wives-did-gautama-buddha-really-say-so/(accessed 31.03.20.)

APPENDIX

An (adapted) old Jewish Tale: **The Two Beautiful Women**

There were two beautiful women who lived in a small house on the edge of their village. One was called Truth and the other Story. They were exceedingly beautiful; indeed it would be difficult to find anyone more beautiful.

One day they got into a discussion about who was most beautiful. It soon turned into an argument that went on and on. So they decided to end the argument by having a contest.

They would each walk through the main street of the village on their own and see who attracted the most attention and admirers. They drew lots to see who would go first. The lot fell on Truth. So she went first and started walking down the main street of the village. But as the villagers saw her, most started moving away. Many went into their houses and many who were looking out from their windows moved away and some drew their curtains. Thinking that she was going to lose, Truth became more and more desperate. When she reached the end of the street only a few people were left. She got so desperate and fearful of losing that she did the only thing she could think of to attract their attention, she took off all her clothes and started walking back down the street again. But even then the few people left ran back into their houses and almost every window was shut and the curtains drawn until not even a single person was left on the street.

Story ran out to find out what had happened, but Truth looked desperate and with her head cast down she told Story what had happened.

So Story put her cloak on and set off. As soon as she entered the main street, the villagers started to come out and join her. The windows all opened and the curtains were drawn. By the time she reached the far end there was a huge crowd around her. When she walked back the entire village had swarmed around her, admiring her every move.

Truth felt totally humiliated and humbly confessed that her friend, Story must be the most attractive and beautiful. But Story said “It's not that I'm more attractive or beautiful. It's just that no-one likes the truth and especially when it's the naked truth! Why not borrow my cloak?”

She draped it around Truth, who set off once more down the main street. This time the people all flocked around her to hear what she had to say.

CHAPTER 4

The Coin of Communication: Listening and Speaking

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CHAPTER 4

INTRODUCTION

This chapter is concerned with communication, specifically listening and speaking. The chapter offers ideas and insights designed to help educators and facilitators become aware of and reflect on their own listening and speaking practices when working with groups. The ideas and insights outlined can also be used by facilitators to discern listening and speaking preferences and patterns among participants in their groups, and can inform the way they can draw attention to and respond to these preferences and patterns.

With regard to listening, distinctions will be made between listening **to**, listening **through** and listening **for**. As for speaking we suggest that we all have "language" preferences and that we have varying levels of fluency in different "languages." In brief, we distinguish between three languages, the Head (ideas), the Heart (Emotions) and the Hands (action). There are echoes in these languages of the view of the soul explored in chapter three.

In terms of structure, we will begin the chapter by looking at the notions of listening **to** and listening **through** by describing an exercise we use with groups. We then look at the question of speaking and languages. Finally, we will return to the idea of listening **for.**

LISTENING TO ...

At the early stages of a course we often stress the importance of listening. This contributes to creating the space for the group referred to in chapter two. We invite participants to do a simple exercise designed to raise awareness of their listening. We give them a sheet with a series of unfinished sentences and invite them to complete the sentences.

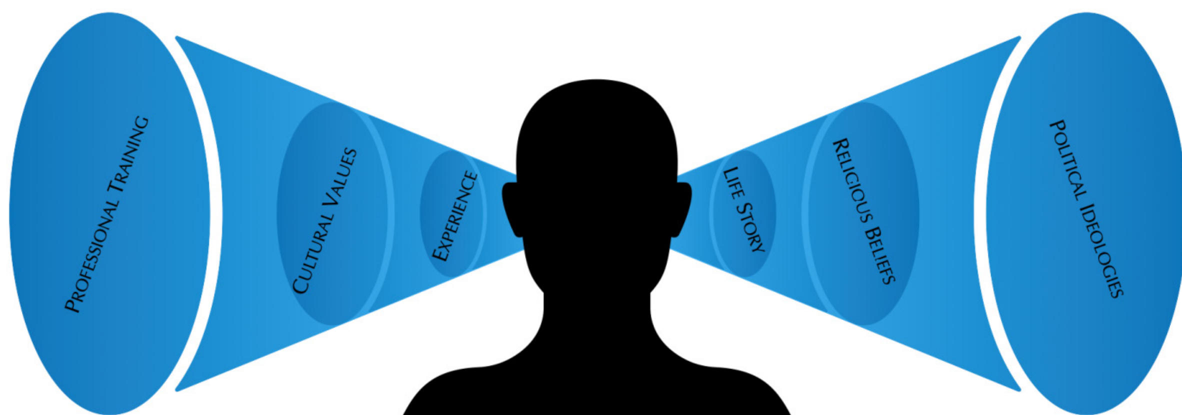
Examples of some of these sentences are:

1. I find it easy to listen when ...
2. I find it hard to listen when...
3. The people I find it hard to listen to are ......
4. I really like listening to people who ...
5. I never listen when ...
6. I get excited when I listen to...
7. My heart sinks when I listen to...
8. Don't ask me to listen when...
9. I listen best when...

On completion of the sentences, participants share their responses in small groups. This sharing is often accompanied by nodding heads, earnest discussion and laughter. The exercise is not designed to "improve" participants' listening skills but to raise awareness about how they listen to others or what is happening to them as they listen to others. We name this as listening to.

LISTENING THROUGH ... [1]

We introduce the idea of listening through by suggesting that we not only listen to others but we that we also listen through... We use a simple illustration to explain this:



When we are listening to other people we are generally listening through the filter of our own experience. We may assume we know what they are experiencing because we have had a similar experience. For example, if someone is describing a medical condition and treatment, we may assume their experience is the same as ours if we have been treated for the same condition. The filters through which we listen are

quite extensive. **Our life story, attitudes, cultural values, political ideologies, religious beliefs, professional training etc. can all influence what we actually hear. These act as filters through which we hear the other person.**

An example from cross-cultural communication is illustrative [2]. Members of one cultural group may have a preference for self-effacing speech while members of another group may prefer self-enhancing speech. Self-effacing talk puts an emphasis on humility and modesty and this is seen as a sign of strength, respectability and a desire for harmony with others. It is based on the belief that if you are sure of who and what you are you do not need to go telling other people what they should think about you. However people coming from a self-enhancing perspective may "hear" self-effacing speech as evidence of weakness, incompetence and a lack of self-confidence.

On the other hand, self-enhancing talk puts the emphasis on self-affirmation and self-approval and this is seen as a sign of self-confidence and self-esteem and a way of establishing one's credentials. It is based on the belief that you know best what your strengths are and that it is important to present yourself in a good light so that people may appreciate you. However, people coming from a self-effacing background may "hear" such self-enhancing speech as evidence of boastfulness, pride and arrogance.

We are not suggesting that one can do away with filters and engage in filter-less listening. That is neither possible nor advisable. We are not inviting people to be naïve or guileless. What is possible, albeit challenging, is to become aware of one's own filters and the impact they are having on one's listening. I can then decide if the filter is helping or hindering the conversation. I can choose to engage in the dialogical practice of suspending judgement. Our filters often invite us to make value judgments quickly: we make assessments that what someone said is good or bad, right or wrong, etc. Suspension of judgment isn't about ceasing to exercise judgement. Rather, it's about noticing what our judgments are - and then holding them lightly so that we can still hear what others are saying, even when it may contradict our own judgments.

We don't simply listen to others, we listen to them through our filters. The challenge is to engage in a form of double listening. We listen to the other and we listen to ourselves listening! When we listen to ourselves listening, we become aware of the filters through which we listen and we can decide what we want to do about that.

THE THREE LANGUAGES ... [3]

We often introduce the idea of the three languages by asking a participant to list some of the languages they speak. A recent example was a woman who spoke Ukrainian, Russian and English. We asked her to order the languages in terms of fluency. She said that she learned Ukrainian first, then Russian and then English. However, at this stage of her life she said she is almost as comfortable in English as in Ukrainian and that she has become less fluent in Russian. We then suggest that when we engage in conversation we often use different "languages".

One categorisation suggests three language domains.

Meaning/Understanding (Head)

Feeling/Emotion (Heart)

Power/Action (Hands)

Meaning/Understanding (Head).

This language brings us into the world of thought, policy, philosophy and principles. We seek meaning and significance. When we use this language we might ask: what do we believe and value? why are we doing what we are doing? have we thought this through? does everyone understand? Is this clear and coherent? what is the meaning or significance of this event?

Feeling/Emotion (Heart).

When we use this language we tend to see the world as a network of relationships and we are concerned with issues like connection, nurturance, concern, care and inclusion. We ask questions like: how do we feel about this? how do others feel? how will this impact on people? do people feel included, respected? are we taking care of everybody?

Power/Action (Hands).

Here we enter the world of energy and action, competence and efficacy. We are concerned about getting things done, accepting responsibility and clarifying roles. We tend to ask questions like: what are we going to do? who will do what? what is our decision? who is in charge? what is the next step.

As facilitators and educators, we face a twin challenge. We need to be aware of our own language preferences and of the way that shapes our engagement in the work. For example, which language(s) am I most fluent in and inclined to use a lot? Are the questions I ask reflective of one language? Do I steer conversations so that I stay in the comfort zone of my preferred language(s)?

All three languages are necessary if ongoing conversations are to be meaningful, satisfying and productive. However, we may find that, through personal preference or organisational culture, one language gains a privileged position. We may face the challenge of working in a very diverse group where people have different preferences and not everyone is tri-lingual.

Awareness of the languages and the patterns of language use in the group can allow us intervene more skilfully.
For example, if one language is overused and another underused, we may seek ways to redress that imbalance. It is not uncommon in our work with groups to hear people speak of groups where the languages of Meaning/ Understanding and of Power dominate and the language of Feeling/Emotion is neglected or side-lined. In other groups there may be a strong preference for the languages of Feeling and of Meaning / Understanding, but the language of Power is less evident.

LISTENING FOR ... [4]

We have looked at the notions of listening to, listening through and the three languages. The three languages give a pointer to what we might be listening for as we work with individuals and groups. To be effective listeners, we must listen for thoughts, for feelings and for intentions. This can be described as:

- Listening for the language of the Head - the Thinking Level - for thoughts, facts, concepts, arguments, ideas and the principles behind these.
- Listening for the language of the Heart - the Feeling Level - for feelings, emotions, mood, experience and the values behind these.
- Listening for the Hands - the Power/Action Level - for intentions, energy, direction, motivation, actions.

If we discern the language people are speaking, we can align ourselves more closely with them. Responses in a language people have used creates for them a sense of being heard. If we respond in another language there is a danger of a mismatch of languages. It is not that we must continue to use that language but initial responses are often the basis on which people decide if they have been heard or not.

CONCLUSION

This chapter addressed the question of communications, specifically listening and speaking. It looked at three forms of listening: listening to, listening through and listening for. It offered a perspective on three languages; the language of meaning/understanding (the head), the language of feelings/emotions (the heart) and the language of power/action (the hands). It showed how these ideas about listening and speaking can promote self-awareness in educators and also enable them to better "read" a group and respond creatively.

FOOTNOTES

[1] The distinction between listening to and listening through was an idea we picked up from The Center for Narrative Studies. We have developed the idea for our own purposes. An article on their work can be accessed at http://www.storywise.com/old/Key_Writings/Key_Writings-Listening.htm

[2] Material on cross-cultural communications can be found in Ting-Toomey, S. (1999) Communicating Across Cultures New York: The Guilford Press and Gao, G. and Ting-Toomey, S. (1998) Communicating Effectively with the Chinese Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications. Another useful source is Sheehy, M., Naughton, F., and O Reagan, C. (2007) Partners Intercultural Companion to Training for Transformation. Dublin: Partners (Training for Transformation)

[3] Our work on the three languages is primarily informed by Isaacs, W. (1999) Dialogue and the Art of Thinking Together. New York: Doubleday and Kantor, D. (2012) Reading the Room: Group Dynamics for Coaches and Leaders, San Francisco: John Wiley and Sons, Inc.

[4] We found helpful material about listening in Barefoot Collective (2009) Barefoot Guide to Working with Organisations and Social Change. Available for download at https://www.barefootguide.org/bfg1-english.html See especially pps. 28-31

CHAPTER 5

Digital storytelling: a focus on group facilitation processes in digital learning

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NTRODUCTION

“The following chapter introduces Digital Storytelling and its possible community intervention and workshop facilitation applications in the field of adult participatory learning. The chapter is the result of years of experience in the field of group-work sessions both in Italy and at European level. It is meant to be a resource for entering the thought process, more than a practical action guide.

For this reason it deals with the nature of language. It introduces you to how words pass from the speaker to the receiver, and what happens in between. Because of its nature, language is always populated by images, and the work on both images and linguistic structure facilitate a discovery or recovery journey during which all steps are progressive opportunities to enlighten self-awareness.

The acknowledgement of this is important for entering the specific process of Digital Storytelling and in understanding how the process will facilitate mutual transition between individuals and groups, or community, and vice-versa.

The LABC approach to group-work as a learning and training process represents a direct translation of our principles: our experience, dedication and professionalism is always offered as a resource to open-up new spaces and encourage individuals to encounter new questions. By truly believing that the road is made by walking, we are rewarded with the reciprocal discovery of the uniqueness of each individual within the group and the community”.

“To imagine a language is to imagine a form of life.”
Ludwig Wittgenstein

THE NATURE OF WORDS

Words, by their nature, are lent, and lend themselves. As often happens, people bring words that are lent to us, and that lend themselves to say something of what they express. The wonder of words is that, in the passage from one speaker to another, everyone appropriates them.

The double nature of words is fascinating: they arrive with us as a loan of the thoughts and emotions of those who speak to us, and at the same time they are returned to give voice to our internal world with its play, thoughts, seductions and reflections. Words and language open up the mystery of how the relationship we have with the other is structured. Words tell stories, speak to us, and raise a veil over the person who places himself or herself in front of the other.

Each word tells a story, and works through images.

Digital Storytelling is a combination: words are lent by the authors to a public who will receive them as a visual narration in the shape of a spoken video.The magic is that Digital Storytelling allows the combination of symbolic elements of ours with images and linguistics, all together forming a given output in the form of a video.

What is it about?

Digital Storytelling is a method that accompanies and supports individuals in focusing on oneself and ones' story, to transfer the memory of them, and to dramatize them through a group-work process that last for an average of 2 to 3 days and results in a roughly two-minute short video narrated by the storyteller. As with many group-work experiences, Digital Storytelling is a method that can be applied in all areas where there is a need to create and tell individual or collective stories.

As with any process, it is made of steps: the fundamental requirements for any Digital Storytelling experience are photographs and images. It is precisely in this phase of individual iconographic research that the inner-excavation works and first reflections on the narrative originate. Digital Storytelling is a valuable tool for developing computer skills (ICT), learning and social skills such as communication skills (in mother tongue and foreign languages), self-awareness and self-esteem.

The most significant acquisition is the ability to recognize each story as a construct, a contrivance for the representation of reality. The process of Digital Storytelling allows the experiential learning of how visual, cinematographic and dramaturgical tools can manipulate the emotional rendering of a story. From this perspective, Digital Storytelling is a formidable tool in developing critical thinking skills.

Digital Storytelling promotes multi-disciplinary learning and shows how the development of different potentials and skills contributes to a unique result that fits the authentic narrative that each participant can offer of him or herself. At first glance, it is clear that the process is a guided and playful accompaniment to the development of digital skills and communicative competence.

Not just digital

Creating a digital story does not only mean acquiring skills in using existing software for video editing or knowing the best formats and ways to publish content on the Internet. It means above all to gain experience with different levels of communication that must integrate and harmonize into a single video product.

The video format opens up a range of new expressive possibilities and imposes insuperable constraints, within this perimeter the participant must make choices and manage their project following a complex structure of successive steps.

The realization of a video helps the participant to deeply understand the different levels of communication and to manage them from newly opened perspectives: conscious delivery of awareness and acknowledgement of individuals stories.

It teaches how to show the authentic emotional side and the best ways to communicate it.

Mastering the technique is not an end by itself, but a means by which to achieve a greater degree of expressive freedom.
In principle, the construction of a digital story is a training experience that helps the participants to improve:

- Critical thinking.
- Problem solving.
- Project management.
- Organisation.
- Result-oriented and process-oriented approaches.
- Time management.

Not just storytelling

Digital Storytelling is a method that focuses on individual and emotional storytelling. The experience of a Digital Storytelling workshop is a process of acquiring experiential awareness of emotions within a group dimension. The result of the workshop is the acquisition or improvement of the ability to narrate in accordance with the basic rules of narration in a personal way. Thanks to this experience, each participant can identify his or her own style.

In addition, the necessary transition to sharing in the group teaches how to interact with others. The challenge is to see the not-so-slight difference between “listen to” and “listen through”. The group-work process introduces an active listening aimed at welcoming other people's contributions, avoiding non-productive critical attitudes and preserving a serene and welcoming atmosphere.

The elaboration of an experience through storytelling requires the participant to have an analytical point of view through which one is able to distance from the emotional reaction. This mechanism, besides being at the heart of the healing power of storytelling, stimulates the ability to manage one's emotions, a fundamental competence in emotional intelligence.

Telling and listening within the protected and normalised group increases the participant's empathic capacity towards each other.

Images as well as sounds (spoken words, noises and music) have an evocative power greater than that of the word on the page. Each participant will mix the communicative elements of digital story until finding the right balance between events and emotion. This is equivalent to acquiring an awareness of one's own linguistic and communication tools that can be useful in improving all areas of communication (written communication, public speaking, negotiation, etc).

An experience of recovery between Humans and their community

The group-work process is by its nature an experiential activity where participants are the inhabitants of a process they lead, contribute to, create and explore at the same time. In different terms, it works both practically and experientially on one side, and metaphorically on the other.

It is quite a common experience for almost every child to enter the magical mystery of the world while listening to tales and stories. During its stages of development, the child will start to create its own stories, will vary the inherited ones, opening up new scenarios that will be exchanged and passed over to others.

Stories are populated with visual elements, as they are precious for the storyteller, who use them to colour the narration, and for the listener, who use them to listen through what the images re-call in its own inner world and memory.

The act of sharing contents and image together is a powerful element for bringing together the teller and the listener, leading to a net result of creating a common emotional ground.

This is a recovery process where images, emotions, thoughts and memories merge together to link single individuals.

If we see this as a pliable movement, it would look like the path of recovery between humans and their community. A path where what is individual gains dignity and gets shared with others who recognize it as part of a common ground, a common heritage, a common language.

It is the movement where what is property of an individual become property of a community, and vice-versa at the same time.

The facilitators will guide participants to focus on their inner-world by recalling a memory or a personal experience, for which each will prepare a set of pictures. As the memory works mostly as picturing-activity, the connection between outside and inner-world starts from the very beginning.

The activity of choosing a personal episode of life-story, then of choosing a set of pictures that will represent it are initial steps of a process which combine the individual dimension with the group dimension.

It is a process where the individual and social parts of a person meet the group dimension.

It is a path that links human individuality with the community, favouring the acknowledgement of a sense of belonging.

FROM INDIVIDUALS TO GROUP: LEADING TO MEET THE COMMUNITY

The process of the workshop is based on some assumptions, which are the basis of group-work sessions. As Bion defined in his "Experiences in Groups and other papers", groups experience that there are actually two groups operating from within: the work-group and the basic-assumption-group. While the first refers to the objectives, tasks and challenges the group is formed for, the second refers to the recurrent emotional states that operate within the group dynamics. Bion identified three basic-assumptions:

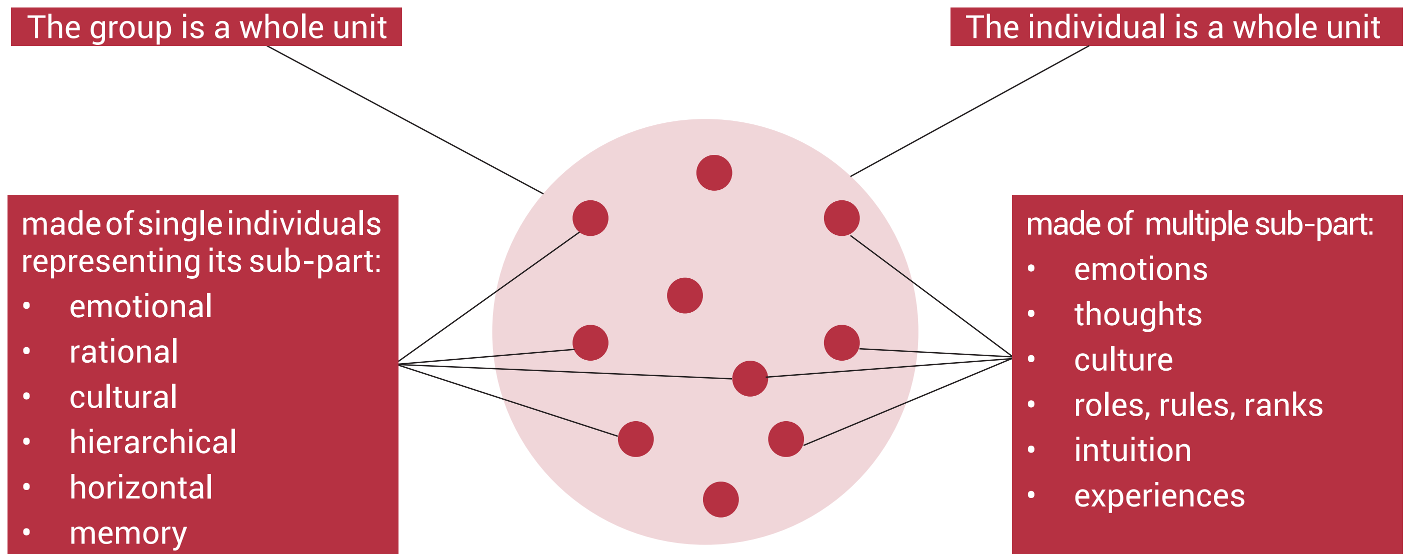
- **Dependency**: referring to a hierarchical order where the community is guided by an implicit proxy to an external object to act as leadership to provide security; it originates a dynamic where the group behaves passively and act as though the leader, by contrast, is omnipotent and omniscent, opening up to eventual resentments

- **Fight-flight**: referring to a self-defence modality, where the group fluctuates from an aggressive mode ("fight" position) to an escaping mode ("flight" position) where chit-chat, useless stories or late arrivals allow to avoid the task

- **Pairing:** referring to a ritual narcissistic position which assume the group is there for a sexual (reproductive) purpose, where two members carry out the work of the group through their continuous interaction (whether based on attraction or repulsion) while the other members eagerly allow the pair to lead and take decisions with a sense of relief and anticipation.

The challenge is to guide and facilitate the group to experience itself as a unit by keeping the uniqueness of its participants. Through the process, participants contribute to the construction of the self- of their group, passing through a mathematical metaphor.

Metaphorically speaking, being in a group leads participants to experience themselves as fractions of a larger whole (the group itself). Consequently, each participant is a sub-part of the whole unit. At the same time, each human being is a completely individual unit, who is composed of multiple sub-parts: cultural heritage and values; ranks, roles and rules; experiences; emotions; intuitions, just to name a few. In our experience, everyone can discover this mirroring effect between the different levels, simply because it reflects a given nature.



It can be experimented with both in an explicit and shared form: just as a group is made up of a set of singularities in which each singularity is an expression and fraction of the whole, so the set of parts of each participant bears within the group the sum of its individual fractions, its own being and experiencing itself as a fraction of its own individual whole.

During a session, participants once enlightened this mathematical functionality: **"... we are all working around the lowest common denominator of the relationships that we do not have ...".**

In mathematics, the denominator indicates how many equal parts a unit is divided in.

In turn, in the fractions, the common denominator is any multiple of the denominators of the fractions that make up the whole.

It is the experience of becoming a fraction within a bigger unit. As we like to say, **"community is when individuals experience the path between being social fractions and to be-come-unit".**

We start the journey from these assumptions, and propose the group be guided into a self-shaping path which might lead to a transformative effect: the group becomes a learning community where participants experience a personal and group journey that link the individual aspects with their social parts. In the experience, the journey is a "linking" path:

- From personal to social.
- From actions to awareness and to acknowledge.
- From the use of individual rank to control what happens, to openness to the curiosity of what happens.
- From a ‘listen to’ approach to a “listen through” perspective.
- From the individual to the community.

ENGAGING THE COMPLEXITY WITH SIMPLICITY: BUILDING THE LINK BETWEEN “REAL, SYMBOLIC AND IMAGINARY” AND “INDIVIDUAL, SOCIAL AND COMMUNITY”

When facilitating a workshop it is always important to clarify our proposal to be part of a challenging path with participants: **to engage the complexity with simplicity.**

This path is basically an offer to experience the mystery of the individual unconscious filtered without a judgemental perspective, which is collectively outdated through a continuous positioning and moving in both vertical and horizontal dimensions. The challenge is not only to be part of a training and group-work experience, which can lead to one of Bion's basic assumptions.

The challenge is to accompany the participants to have a perspective of their existential presence outside of any religious or spiritual affiliation within the surrounding community. In such a perspective, each participant will meet their own characteristics, and these will receive dignity and respect from the group while adding personal quality to the collective.

As facilitators, we have the important responsibility of being congruent, and offering congruence. Conducting a group in participatory learning means to encourage participants to discover and/or re-discover that we can all participate in a shared journey where the group makes the road by walking. To accomplish this challenge, facilitators have to place themselves in a very peculiar position: one that recognises that they may have much to learn within the new group - an unsaturated dimension of their knowledge. This analytical concept can be linked to the archetypical witness of Socrates in Plato's Apology where we read the famous statement **“I am the wisest man alive, for I know one thing, and that is that I know nothing”.** This position is the one that allows us to meet the other, and to perceive the group as the other while we

are part of it. It means that the filters found in the inner world give rise to a new non-judgmental perspective that allows everyone to feel the acceptance, respect, dignity and belonging of individual aspects as part of a broader discourse, and to experience the group as a community.

The challenge is for anyone to unveil the possible conjunctions and connection between the filters that abide in our self-experience by enlightening their meaning in front of the real, symbolic and imaginery aspects of life. Those inner, and mostly unknown or un-recognised means can be collectively experienced as the link that merges individuals to group and to community.

The unsaturated dimension refers to the attitude and capacity of the facilitator to conduct the group with an holistic approach where humility, curiosity and openness will create a proper group-field environment in which participant expansion is not a disturbance to the group but is generative, as all members experience the combination of the parts of the group (which refers implicitly to the individuals) as the sum of contributions made by each individual, where all possible topologies and geometries create a true group-work experience in all its physical, temporal and emotional aspects.

Curiously, this approach represents a metaphorical image and translation of the quantum group field theory, and, for a reciprocal effect, it remind us that all humans carry within themselves both individual and social dimensions, just as each particle is together energy and matter.

The challenge is the process, the mystery is the result, the reward is the path.

Facilitators

In a Digital Storytelling process, the mission of the facilitator is to help participants find the story that is important to them and that can be instructive for the rest of the group and tell it in their own words so that it can be transformed into an authentic and personal short film. The work of facilitating Digital Storytelling workshops is complex both for the delicate situations that may emerge during the narration phase at an individual level and for the need to coordinate the work of the group.

Considering the critical nature of the issues that may arise during the narration phase and the complexity of the technological knowledge needed to make the film, the trainers work at least in pairs to supervise each other and play complementary roles in the workshop.

In every Digital Storytelling experience two facilitators are required: a training leader who is in charge of the group work, and a technical trainer responsible for all technical training in the use of devices and communication.

The training leader must be competent in the techniques for producing the filmic product, for which he must provide instructions and support throughout the process. At the same time, the capacity to create and maintaining the right climate of trust and complicity within the group is fundamental.

Facilitators must guarantee confidentiality within the group, so that no information shared by a single storyteller can be revealed outside the group except by the storyteller himself or under an explicit consent.

In many European countries, it not mandatory that the training leader has a degree in psychology. Nevertheless, he/she must have both a strong knowledge of group-dynamics, and a significant experience in the delivery of group work, in order to intercept and react promptly to unexpected situations, to channel group dynamics and to manage tensions and conflicts.

The training leader must also have communication and writing skills to help participants in their work with a constant but discreet presence while respecting the self-determination of the storyteller and preserving the autonomy of choice.

The technical trainer must master all the digital and technological knowledge to make the video, record the voice and edit the film. They must have great problem solving skills and the ability to transfer the competence to the participants during the group-working process, so to favour a de-facto learn-by-doing experience.

Participants

As a Digital Storytelling workshop can be attended by participants of different ages, origins and life-styles, the work can result in a variety of objectives, purposes and scenarios. The difference from a school learning training is evident, the focus on an open specific theme, which entails that all situations need to be handled with skill, ranging from very delicate and dedicated care in case of trauma recovery to attention and guidance in creating a truly shared experience.

Digital Storytelling is a tool also suitable for working with primary school children. In this case, the supervision of an adult teacher who supports the process from outside is recommended.

Experience has shown that the experience brings significant intensity, which can lead to different emotions between participants. Facilitators are responsible for handling each of them with dedication and care.

Group work dimensions

Generally speaking, the ideal number of people for a Digital Storytelling group is between 5 and 8, as it guarantees each participant the appropriate attention and a fair division of roles among the members in respect of their characteristics, skills and interests. In case of higher number of participants, it is recommended to maintain the ratio of participants to facilitators.

In general terms, if the group is open and the participants are meeting for the first time, a common story or theme is helpful to introduce them to a common path from the original development of a personal story.

Steps of the working process

Each Digital Storytelling workshop can last between 2 and 3 days, which comprises the following main steps or working phases:

Step 1: icebreaker and warmup.

Step 2: clear and explicit definition of the rules.

Step 3: narrative experience and creative activities.

Step 4: finalisation of individual stories.

Step 5: creation of the storyboard.

Step 6: video editing of pictures.

Step 7: voice recording.

Step 8: synchronisation of video and audio parts.

Step 9: finalisation of the Digital Story.

Step 10: share the Digital Stories between participants.

Step 11: collect of authorisation for the use of the produced Digital Stories.

For a more detailed description of the working phases, please see the relative steps:

Step 1: Icebreakers and warmup

This stage of the process supports the achievement of the main objective of creating connection and trust between participants.

Various group games, activities and icebreakers can be performed to build a climate of trust by outlining the perimeter of the workshop. A confidentiality pact has to protect the participants of the working group so that they feel free to express their emotions and tell their stories.

To build a climate of trust and respect it is necessary that participants get to know each other and break the ice. In this phase, the trainer proposes some knowledge games in order to encourage communication between participants and the sharing of personal characteristics that will be a fundamental part of the individual narratives.

Step 2: Clear and explicit definition of the rules

Sharing the rules is the responsibility of the training leader who is the guarantor of their observance. The training leader must effectively describe the rules to the participants:

- What storytelling is.
- How the process develops, indicating the timing.
- What are the activities to be completed at each stage of the process.
- What constraints exist on copyright.
- What use the footage will have later.

Step 3: Narrative experience and creative activities

The transition from memory to storytelling takes place through the "storytelling circle", the crucial and qualifying phase of the whole process, whose aim is to put all participants in a position to find their own story, to define the first drafts of storyboards that will be the basis for word processing and voice-over recording.

At this stage, it is important that the physical space is suitable for the work. In a quiet room where there is no interruption from people outside the process, the participants and the trainer have to be seated around a table, and to be able to see each other. It is recommended to avoid the use or even the presence of mobile phones and PCs, as they could be a source of distraction. Everyone should have the same opportunity to talk; there should be no judgement or criticism. It is crucial for the success of the process that the climate is based on trust and mutual acceptance.

The atmosphere of the story circle is informal, but the trainer has the task of bringing all participants to have a story and a draft narrative structure by the "closing of the circle". The time dedicated to the story circle is between 1½ hours and 2½ hours. The games proposed by the trainer in the previous phase are useful not only to cement the group but also to help choose the story especially among those in the group who have not yet made this decision.

After the group time of the story circle follows an individual activity, the "writing" of the script. For those who have difficulty in organizing a narrative plot, it is possible to use the interview formula, which helps to mark out the narrative steps through the intervention of an interviewer.

Each script must have a word count of between 180 and 320 words. This constraint pushes the participant to exercise his capacity of synthesis and choose among the elements of the story those most functional to the message and emotions he wants to communicate.

The training leader must encourage the participant to use the vocabulary and linguistic structure that allows him/her to preserve the authenticity and sincerity of the story.

The training leader's support is achieved through questions that help the participant to focus on the salient points and to make the story linear and captivating, without ever suggesting changes or making corrections directly. Reading the scripts aloud helps to understand if the story has a regular development and if it "works". The trainer should discourage the use of literary effects and artifice unless they are fundamental to the storytelling.

As in any creative process, it can be useful to start with an accumulation phase in which the participant inserts in the story many details and descriptions that will make his story authentic and sincere. In the next phase, in which he will write the actual script, the participant will proceed by subtraction and get a rich and at the same time effective story.

Step 4: Finalisation of individual storiesactivities

The script will be reviewed with feedback. Each participant must be able to summarize his or her story in a single sentence. This exercise allows you to easily intercept elements that are not useful for logical progression. At the end of this phase each participant will have created his final story, through progressive revisions will have enhanced the message, defined the internal passages of the narrative and found his own style.

Steps 5 & 6: Creation of the storyboard and video editing of pictures

Once the story has been written, participants will transfer it into the storyboard of the video.

It is important to remember that for a 2-minute video the ideal number of images/ photos is between 15 and 25. Below, the resulting rhythm is too slow down; above and the rhythm becomes so fast that it is difficult to follow the story.

Selecting images appropriately means making a narrative and summary choice. The participant has to be supported by the facilitators in this process to emphasize the moments they want.

The easiest way to get a storyboard is to use a billboard divided into two columns. In one column the images will be placed and in the other the corresponding text sentences. For a movie with a regular pace the photo/text ratio is one image per couple of sentences. This ratio can be altered where the dramaturgy of the story requires it. In the storyboard, it is recommended to include any sound effects if they are part of the narrative.

The result is a visual scheme where it is easy to identify changes in rhythm, moments of pathos and the general progress of the story. In this phase, you can intervene with small changes and variations.

Step 7: Voice recording

The voice-recording phase is particularly critical because it introduces problems of a different order, some of a technical nature but fundamental for the success of digital storytelling, and others of an emotional nature related to the individual component of the story and the awareness of the sound of one's own voice.
From a technical point of view, the goal is to obtain quality audio that fully enhances the value of the narrative. There are some rules and practical suggestions to consider.

► In the room there must be no electronic devices switched on (not even in silent mode) because they emit noises that are hard to hear with the human ear but can be distinguished in the recorded track.

► If you do not have a soundproof room, it is preferable to choose a closed, quiet space furnished with sound-absorbing objects, such as tents and chairs or sofas upholstered in velvet or heavy fabrics able to limit environmental echo.

► The recording of the reading of the stories can be done more than once taking care to ensure that all parts are clear at least in one of them.

From an emotional point of view, especially if it is the first time, the participant has recorded his voice; it will be difficult for him to enjoy the result.
The physical perception that each of us has of our own voice is related to sound waves amplified by the cranial cavity and is generally more severe than that perceived outside without this resonator. This means that it is difficult to recognize and appreciate the sound of our voice, which in the recording is more acute and shrill than the individual expects, and suggests the idea of less seriousness and authority, characteristics that we associate with a low tone of voice.

Precisely for this reason it is necessary to dedicate a large time slot, in which the participant can make various rehearsals and “get in touch” with his recorded voice and not alter the emotional impact of his narration and his experience of digital storytelling.

Step 8: Synchronisation of video and audio parts

The final technical phase is the editing where recorded voices, sounds and images will be coordinated in the creation of the video.

In this phase, the participant with the support of the technical trainer will acquire the digital technical skills for the creation of his video story.
This activity takes place-using PCs and makes use of the skills of the technical trainer.

It is important that all the PCs in use are previously checked in order to avoid moments of distraction and so that the participants can be immediately operational without facing malfunctions or difficult application setup.

The technical trainer has to define in advance which software will be used for the editing. It is important to choose an application that the trainer is familiar with.

Before starting the work, the technical trainer has to gradually explain the necessary activities and the basic functions of the software by making a demonstration montage. The trainer has to make it clear to the classroom that the function of the montage is to harmonise the elements of the story they have prepared during the workshop (the recorded voice, images, sounds). Only after this can the participants start testing their materials.

Step 9: Finalisation of the Digital Story

The technical trainer has to be present to help the participants to get the output they want and to eliminate disturbances or errors in the montage. He has to make participants aware of precise technical details such as image resolution and format. As soon as the result corresponds to the narrator's expectations, the editing phase ends and each participant will get a video file in one of the formats required for uploading to the internet (.mov, .mp4, .mpeg, .avi etc.).

Step 10: Share the Digital Stories between participants

At this point, it is time to share the films through a group viewing. The final aim of the workshop is to show the digital stories to the public through a public screening and online exhibition.

While publication on the internet and sharing with an external audience is at the discretion of the participant, the sharing of the digital stories within the working group is an essential point of the digital story telling process.

The viewing is the act of celebration of the process that engaged the trainer and the participants in a 20-22 hour process.

The trainer has the task of managing the viewing event with due solemnity, setting up a dedicated room where the screen is clearly visible and the reproduction of good quality. He has to introduce each video with a short speech that has to give attention to the work and relieve the participant from embarrassment.

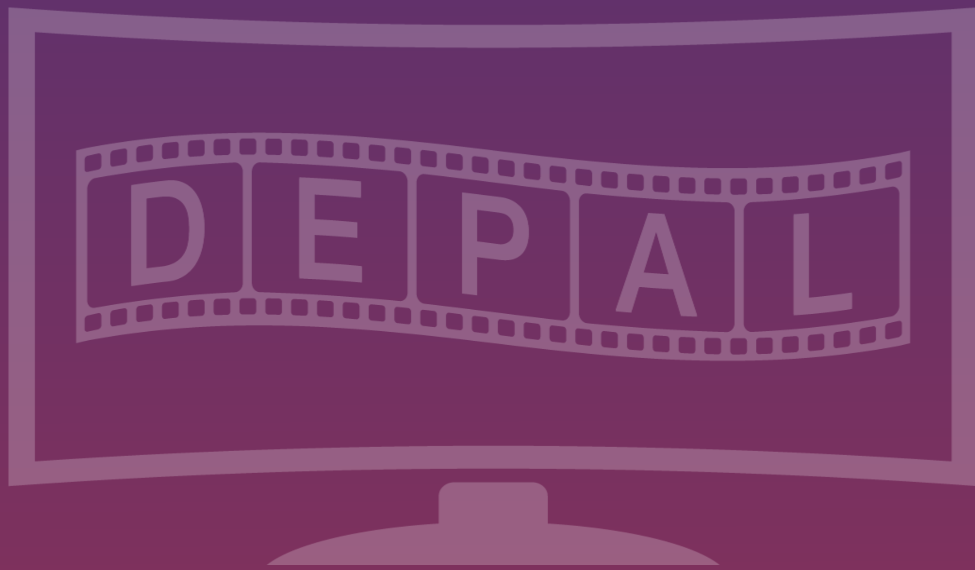
Step 11: Collect authorisation for the use of the produced Digital Stories

The participants of the workshop must all be present and, if they all agree, they can invite external people. Critical remarks are not allowed.

The final act of the digital storytelling workshop is the final debriefing in which each participant, including the trainers, talk about their experience. The conversation focuses on the process and not on the product of the work (the videos).

It is important that at this stage everyone share their feedback by explaining their strengths and weaknesses.

In the closing circle participants can authorise or deny authorisation for the publication of their digital story on the internet and any subsequent showings.



Digital Education Participatory
Adult Learning

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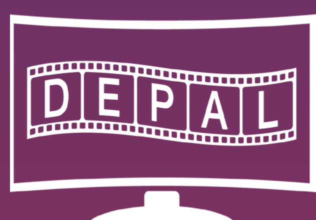

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