

## **Facilitation:**

Due to the high level of involvement, activity and discussion in adult education, a large part of being a trainer is facilitation. Facilitation by definition is an activity which makes easy the tasks of others.

Facilitation covers many areas from creating an appropriate environment so that persons of a group can generate ideas, to guiding them on decisions and conclusions,

In order to assist others, it is essential to have a good understanding of how information is communicated, so that problems and questions can be addressed, and solutions found.

We will now look at four skills that are essential to the success of a good facilitator. These skills are:

- Questioning
- Listening
- Recognising and using body language
- Using flip charts effectively

## **Questioning**

Asking and answering questions is an essential part of learning. Because of this, facilitators must plan their questions and responses carefully, so as to produce coherent thought, and aid others in understanding.

### **Techniques for developing good questioning skills**

The response factor is extremely important in the learning process. The more learners actively respond to a learning content, the better they learn and retain it. Response can take the form of discussing an issue, solving a problem, making a decision or simply answering a question. It can be out loud, written down or just in someone's head, the important thing is that it be meaningful. So learning to question well is an important part of teaching.

#### **Asking questions:**

- You should be asking questions to stimulate thought not to test.
- Acknowledge all participants contribution
- Pause after asking a question to allow time for reflection
- Avoid questions that can be answered with a "yes" or "no"
- Feel free to ask questions which do not have a clear answer, where both sides can be argued equally well, these are great for really getting people talking and thinking
- Look for body language, which may indicate an idea and ask the person if they have something to say.
- Avoid questions that put others on the defensive

#### **Answering questions:**

- Write the question where all participants can see (this will depend on the literacy level of your class, if few people can read instead answer one question at a time and be careful to ensure everyone has heard and understood the question being discussed).
- Encourage other responses (If a student looks as though they have a response to a question put to you allow them to respond first, then add anything you have to say to their response).

- If you genuinely do not know the answer to a question do not be embarrassed. Admit that you do not know, if anyone else in the class does, let them answer. If it remains a mystery or unsatisfactorily answered then find out the answer for the next class.

## Listening

Good listening skills are a key factor in becoming a good facilitator. In order to be a productive listener, it is important to conscribe to the following suggestions:

- Listen to the words being expressed
- Present yourself in a manner that communicates interest and attentiveness, this helps build a rapport and encourages interaction
- Interact with the participant to make sure they have an accurate understanding of the information discussed
- Avoid emotional involvement. If you become emotionally involved while listening, you may hear what you want to hear as opposed to what is actually being said. Remain objective.
- Involve yourself by asking questions in your head. Active listening keeps you attached to the material. While listening, try and think of what points the speaker is trying to make.

For further detail on active listening refer back to the document on communication.

## Recognising & using body language to communicate

Body language is an important part of communication. Therefore, understanding body language can assist you in becoming a better communicator. Recognising messages that are sent through body language will allow you to become a better sender and receiver signals. This mode of communication increases the degree of the perceived psychological closeness, between the facilitator and their participants. The following are some examples of basic body language that convey meaning without words.

- A nod may indicate understanding or agreement, where as a frown may indicate confusion or disagreement
- If a facilitator looks at his/her watch while the participant is speaking the participant may think it means *I wish you would stop talking or I'm not listening*
- If a Facilitator looks away or does not maintain eye contact, the participant may think *You are not paying attention to me or You are bored with my comments and conversation*

It is good practice for facilitators to maintain eye contact and nod acknowledgement so the participant knows that you are paying attention to them and their comments.

There are 5 main areas of nonverbal communication:

- Eye contact

Eye contact, an important channel of interpersonal communication, helps regulate the flow of communication, and signals interest in others. Furthermore, eye contact with audiences increases the speaker's credibility. By making eye contact, you open the flow of communication, and convey interest, concern, and credibility

- Gestures

Gesturing while speaking makes you engaging, if you fail to gesture while speaking you could be perceived as, stiff, or boring. Lively animated discussions

facilitate learning. Gestures are also good for showing that you are listening, and engrossed in the conversation.

- Posture and body orientation

You communicate numerous messages by the way you walk, talk, stand and sit. Standing erect, but not rigid, and leaning slightly forward communicates to others that you are approachable, receptive and friendly.

Interpersonal closeness results from face to face communication. Speaking with your back turned away, or looking at the floor or ceiling should be avoided

- Proximity

Cultural norms dictate comfortable interaction distances, but you should be aware of some signals that indicate you are invading someone's personal space. Some of these are:

- Rocking
- Tapping
- Gaze aversion

This does not mean that you should stand as far away as possible. Increasing proximity allows you to make better eye contact. Be your own judge and do what feels comfortable

- Paralinguistics

This area of nonverbal communication includes vocal elements such as:

- Tone
- Pitch
- Rhythm
- Timbre
- Loudness
- Inflection

In order to communicate effectively, it is important to learn how to vary these 5 elements to infuse life into what you are speaking about. Speaking in a monotone voice can lead others to lose interest, or find the subject matter, dull and boring.

## **Using a flip chart or blackboard effectively**

Good use of flip charts or boards will enhance the participants understanding of the message that you are trying to get across as you will be using both audio and visual means of communication. Below are a few tips for using flip charts or boards effectively

- Position flip charts where all participants can easily see.
- Label each sheet for purposes of easy identification. Letters should be large enough to be seen from the back of the class
- Use capital letters for easy reading
- Try to be neat and clear
- Use dark colours
- Alternate your colours to highlight key points
- Use bullets to denote separate points or items

Your use of flip charts or boards will depend on the literacy level of your group. If there is a low level of literacy still try to include them when possible. You will have to be more imaginative but drawing a pictures and diagrams of key points will work well to jog people's memories and remind them of the path the class has taken. Depending on the topic you may want to prepare the board in advance and work your way through the diagrams already there, this will avoid breaking the flow of the class to draw things up. Your students are more important that the board so make sure you never neglect them for it. A other option is involving the

students in the activity, ask one of them to try to draw something to illustrate what you are talking about.

### ***When must you be a facilitator?***

You must change from trainer to facilitator whenever there is an exercise or discussion. Although the difference may seem small it is important, as trainer you are imparting knowledge, as facilitator you are aiding you students to share their knowledge and personalize new information.

### **Discussions:**

During discussions or brainstorming sessions you must:

- Keep the group focused
- Stimulate the discussion
- Ensure people are respectful of one and other. If someone interrupts ask them politely but firmly to wait until the other has finished, then make sure to let them speak next.
- You can, of course, still answer questions when asked but as much as possible you want to get the participants talking. Even if you know an answer try to ask others leading questions so that they arrive at it themselves.

### **Exercises:**

During group work or exercises you must:

- Ensure understanding.
- Ensure participants are respectful of one and other.
- Make yourself available in case questions arise.
- Act as a time keeper giving groups and 15 and 5 minute warning for example.
- Be sensitive to any issues that might arise and try to resolve them with as little time and trouble as possible. This may mean altering the exercise or group structure try to do this as quickly and subtly as possible to avoid it becoming a distraction.