

I. Overview of Facilitation

What is Facilitation?

“It is the process of helping groups, or individuals, to learn, find solutions, or reach consensus without imposing or dictating an outcome. Facilitation works to empower individuals or groups to learn for themselves or find their own answers to problems.”

What is a Facilitator?

A facilitator is a process guide who focuses discussions and clarifies understanding, while encouraging shared decision-making and problem-solving. A facilitator assists the group in creating and achieving common goals and expectations. In general, facilitators do NOT act as content resources:

Resource >Facilitating = Teacher-Centered

Facilitating >Resource = Student-Centered

A strong interest in promoting a basic level of understanding in a diverse group of interprofessional students is particularly important for success as a facilitator. Developing skills in conflict resolution, communication, and in the formation of group dynamics are prerequisites in the process.

Early in the facilitating experience, the process may feel...

...inefficient (“I can tell them the answer in a minute; they are wasting time.”)

...inaccurate (“They’ve got it wrong. I must correct them.”)

...incomplete (“They’ve left something out.”)

However, facilitators *facilitate* content development; they *do not teach* content. Barrows describes the primary role of a facilitator as:



“...someone who did not give students a lecture or factual information; did not tell the students whether they were right or wrong in their thinking; and did not tell them what they ought to study or read. The role is better understood in terms of metacognitive communication. The tutor asks students the kinds of questions that they should be asking themselves to better understand and manage the problem (Barrows, 1988). Eventually the students take on this role themselves, challenging each other” (Barrows, 1996).

In contrast to facilitation, traditional teaching focuses the attention on the teacher and not the student discussion. If facilitators intervene with information, they will portray themselves as the experts and the group will expect them to continue in this role. They will end up as lecturers and will impede the students’ development rather than enhance it.

IPE FACILITATION FUNDAMENTALS

“If the students are not given the freedom to reason and learn on their own because of an overly directive tutor, or if the students are not guided by the teacher to consider all the steps in the clinical reasoning processes... then objectives are compromised” (Barrows, 1986).

II. Facilitating learning vs providing instruction

FACILITATION	INSTRUCTION
	
Guides the process	Presents information
Provides the right questions	Provides the right answers
Helps make it easy for students to learn together in a group, or to achieve something together as a group	Leads a group of students in acquiring new skills, knowledge or understanding
Helps the students to discover by themselves	Starts with the instructor's own knowledge
Encourages expression of different views	May encourage expression of different views but also presents own perspective
Fosters interaction between group	Directs or tells
Develops relationships based on trust, respect and a desire to serve—are considered as an equal	Maintains a formal relationship with students, based on the status of a teacher

III. The Role of the Facilitator

Articulate the purpose of the discussion and its significance to the group.

- Clearly state the goal and the purpose of each activity.
- Let the group know the expected time that they will spend on each activity.
- Stimulate, encourage, and maintain a safe environment.
- Support good interpersonal relationships in the group.
- Observe verbal and non-verbal cues from group members.
- Ensure all disciplinary perspectives represented in the group are presented.
- Stimulate critical thinking.
- Maximize group interaction.
- Help participants reflect upon the experiences they are having.
- Link discussions to practice.
- Challenge thinking.
- Question and probe reasoning.
- Provide frequent feedback.
- Keep the discussion moving when tensions arise or discussions lag.

To be a productive facilitator of small group discussions, a facilitator must:

- be student-centered.
- empower students to assume responsibility for their own learning.
- allow time for discussions.
- facilitate and help manage discussions, but do not provide specific content.
- know how to intervene appropriately to keep the discussion on track and to stimulate thinking.
- practice and encourage reflection and self-assessment.
- know how and when to ask, and how to respond to, questions.

Asking Questions – A Checklist for Facilitators

Do I:

Ask rather than tell whenever possible?

Ask one question at a time?

Adjust the difficulty of the questions to the learners' abilities?

Provide adequate "wait time" for learners to respond to my questions? Don't respond to questions with facts or content.

Do I not respond to questions with facts or content?

First ask if the questioner can answer his/her own question.

Ask if anyone else in the group can answer the question.

Ask if the questioner would like to try to find the answer.

IV. Common Facilitation Challenges

Facilitation Strategies:

Some basic strategies that help prevent some of the challenges that might arise when facilitating a group include:

- Establishing your role up front.
- Checking your biases.
- Being attuned to group and interdisciplinary dynamics.
- Valuing the distinctive experience and expertise each participant brings.
- Being ready to encounter friction that arises due to the collaboration process.
- Understanding issues of power and hierarchy.
- Having a 'parking lot' for when the conversation goes off track (calling a 'time out').
- Setting ground rules/group guidelines at the beginning of the session.
- Not being directing.
- Not stereotyping.
- Allowing participants to direct themselves.
- Ensuring equal participation.
- Considering all ideas presented.
- Being aware of non-verbal communication (i.e. Body language).

Responding to Challenging People

It is inevitable that you will face people in the group that challenge you or are blocking what others are saying. In general you need to address the behavior-not the person-when handling a challenge from one or a few individuals. Try to establish responses that you memorize and can pull out of your head to respond when people are being difficult.

- "Would you see me at the break to discuss this point further?"
- "That is an interesting dilemma - perhaps we can discuss this over lunch."
- "You are very knowledgeable about this topic. Thank you for sharing another perspective."
- "I hear 3 questions. Let's deal with one question at a time." - then repeat the questions you heard them ask, to check for clarity.
- "Thank you for asking. I must not have been clear before. Let me try to explain the concept in a different way."
- Summarize what participants say and ask if this is what they mean.

Dealing with uncertainty

If asked a question you don't know the answer to just remember the mantra: "That is a really good question, what do you/others think?"

Ask open-ended questions – use "why", "how", "what", "where", "who", and "when."

IPE FACILITATION FUNDAMENTALS

The following is an overview of some of the common challenges facilitators might face, the causes of such challenges, and some strategies to address them.

<u>Challenge</u>	<u>Possible Causes</u>	<u>Facilitation Strategies</u>
Keeping the group on track	*High Volume/High Impact *High Volume/Low Impact People focused on their own knowledge and expertise	-Ask them to summarize -Thank them, summarize, and move on to refocus on the agenda or topic -Restate the objectives of the session -Promise to give space for related tangents
Conflict	Personality clashes Perceived hierarchies Disrespect Generational Issues Emotionally charged issues	-Get opinions from others -Note points of disagreements and minimize where possible -Draw attention to the agenda/topic/new question -Review ground rules/engage
*Low Volume—quiet or shy participants	Personality May be lost or confused Cultural differences (familiarity/comfort with collaboration processes; different educational traditions; different approaches to time management; language barriers	-Seek out their opinions -Sincere and subtle recognition -Include adapted forms of participation—reflection questions, pair discussions; praise low volume participant when active
*High volume/High Impact participant—talk all the time	Personality Natural leaders Need to make their point known Well-informed Over-eager	-Ask them challenging questions to slow them down -Summarize their statements and use as a way to bring in quieter members -Ask, “What does everybody else think?”
Use of discipline specific language/jargon	Interdisciplinary group Showing off Unaware language might not be understood	-Ask for a definition or clarification for yourself and the group -Point out that the group may not be familiar with a particular term -Create a ground rule for anyone to say “jargon”—model this yourself when it first appears
Perceived hierarchies	Interdisciplinary group Cultural differences	-Ask group members for different perspectives -Acknowledge value of all contributions

IPE FACILITATION FUNDAMENTALS

Challenge	Possible Causes	Facilitation Strategies
Disruptive group member	Bored Does not see the relevance of discussions May not understand something	-Repeat or summarize the last opinion offered and ask for theirs -Ask the group how they are doing with ground rules (respect?)
No one is talking/contributing	Instructions might not have been clear Lack of Leadership An entire group of Low Volume/High Impact members	-Stimulate interest by seeking their opinions -Pair/share—allows participants to get used to talking in a situation where being silent is much more awkward for them (in a pair)—which segues into a group discussion
Wanting your expertise	Genuine interest Think there is a “right answer”	-Redirect the question to others -Reaffirm your role as a facilitator, and that there are benefits to peer-based investigation

*As facilitators we can view student ability in the group process by these four categories:

High Volume/High Impact:

-Talk a lot and say important things.

High Volume/Low Impact:

- Talk all the time with nothing of substance.

Low Volume/Low Impact:

Don't speak; is it because they are not prepared or do not understand or are not engaged?

Low Volume/High Impact:

-Don't speak often, but when they do it is a major contribution.

V. IPE Facilitation

Facilitating interprofessional groups of students is recognized as a **complex and demanding task** that differs from facilitating groups of students from a single healthcare discipline. Facilitators play a crucial role in creating an environment that supports the goals of interprofessional collaboration. There are some unique skills, beyond general facilitation skills, that are required for effectively facilitating an interprofessional group, as there are some unique issues that may arise:

- Use of discipline specific language / jargon.
- Perceived hierarchies.
- Different / conflicting expertise.
- Professional-based stereotyping.
- Participants at different levels / stages in their program.
- Difficulty entering into professional dialogue due to uncertainties about other disciplines.
- Difficulty transferring knowledge from one field to another.
- Perceived relevancy or lack of relevancy of the topic/case/discussion to a particular profession or student group.

Interprofessional Facilitation Skills

Those facilitating an interprofessional group need to understand the elements of group dynamics and team formation. They need to be able to role model communication and leadership skills and be confident managing conflict. Applying educational principles such as adult learning theory, reflective practice, problem-based learning, experiential learning, critical appraisal and questioning techniques is essential in the success of interprofessional learning. Therefore, interprofessional facilitators need to act as coaches and must be able to use a variety of interactive methods to promote learner autonomy and experiential learning. Interprofessional facilitator need to understand the dynamic nature of interprofessional learning, ways to optimize learning opportunities, and how to value the distinctive experience and expertise.

Link discussions to practice

Facilitators should establish the link between effective team collaboration and patient/client care. At the conclusion of the experience, students should realize the value of collaboration and recognize that no one profession has all of the answers for a patient/client. Ideally, learning experiences should enable participants to work with others to assess and plan care for particular patients. During this process, facilitators will need to manage differences and misunderstandings, and foster interdependent relationships between participants.

Include all perspectives

Participants may come from a variety of backgrounds. It is the facilitator's responsibility to ensure that everyone's roles, skills and expertise are respected and appreciated. Facilitators should provide learners with opportunities to describe their role, which recognizing the constraints of that role based on patient

needs and their own competence. Interprofessional learning experiences should help participants recognize and respect the roles and responsibilities of other professions in relation to their own.

VI. AREAS OF FACILITATION –Miscellaneous Facilitator Responses & Actions

Each heading contains an action, question, or example of a ‘stock’ facilitator response. These are primarily open-ended questions or statements that are key to a facilitator’s ability to engage and competently “coach” a group of Interprofessional students. These statements and questions can be utilized as an appendix and guide for facilitators in preparation for group sessions.

Knowledge (Depth & Breadth)

- Elicits students’ reasoning process.
“What are you hoping to find out?”
“What are your reasons for asking that question?”
“How would knowing the answer make a difference in your approach to the patient’s problem?”
- Asks for clarification of concepts, terms, and discipline-specific jargon.
- Is sensitive to psychosocial issues.
“What support does this 16-year- old, pregnant, non-wed patient have at home?”
“How could this situation have been presented?”

Teaching Skills

- Focuses the group’s attention on the discussion, not on the facilitator.
“What does the group think?”
- Asks open ended, probing, facilitating questions.
“Are there other ways that the healthcare team could have managed the communication with the patient’s family?”
- Tolerates silence.
Wait 15 to 20 seconds after asking a question before speaking again.
Allow students time to search their memories.
- Maintains continuity and focus of discussion by asking for periodic summaries.
“What do we know so far?”
“What issues have we not yet covered?”
- Reflects questions back to the group.
“What do you think?”
“Can anyone think of an answer to that?”
“How would you go about finding the answer?”
- Establishes a positive learning climate.
Be enthusiastic and accepting.

IPE FACILITATION FUNDAMENTALS

Group Process Skills

- Helps to establish clear ground rules for group at the beginning of unit.
Be explicit: write them down and pass them out; negotiate; make students' expectations as much a part of the group sessions as yours.
- Promotes active listening.
Listen attentively.
Encourage members to listen to each other.
Quote students during evaluation.
- Insists that one person speaks at a time.
Preferable when students set this up as a ground rule.
- Observes body language and facial expressions.
Note when someone is confused or wants to say something.
- Helps each person take a turn as group leader and facilitator.
Support the group, try this as an experiment; give feedback to student.
- Ensures that every student participates.
"Who would like to go first?"
"Who has not yet had a chance to add to the discussion?"
- Encourages students to interact with each other.
"What do the rest of you think about that?"
"Does anyone have anything to add to that?"
- Remains flexible.
Don't force the group to fit your agenda if the discussion is productive.
- Deflect uneducated guessing into search for mechanisms.
"Do you know or are you guessing?"
- Facilitates renegotiation of ground rules when necessary.
"It seems like we are not sticking to our ground rules, e.g., respect.
Do you want to re-examine them?"
- Creates open environment for discussion.
"That's interesting."
"I'd like to learn more about that." ---be positive and supportive.
- Helps group to "own" their group session and assume responsibility for their collective and individual learning.
"It seems like we have a problem. How do you want to resolve it?"
- Promotes efficient use of time.
"Is this the best use of our time?"
- Keeps the group on track.
"Where are we going?"
"Are we doing what we agreed to do?"
- Is flexible and supportive of the group.
Provide constructive feedback about positive aspects of the group.

IPE FACILITATION FUNDAMENTALS

- Recognizes own limitations
Role models for student: "I don't know" or "That's an area I need to study or review."
- Actively involves learners in group process.
- Uses "I" messages.
"I feel like your answers don't have enough depth" –versus- "Your answers don't have enough depth."

Keeping discussions on track

- When a participant questions the process or otherwise wants to take the group in a different direction, it can be helpful to turn that question to the group.
"Well, what do you think?"
"Let's consider that question for a minute.
What are people's thoughts?"
- Keep people working with the process and ground rules that the group agreed to.
"Remember, this is just the brainstorming stage - clarifications and discussion will follow later."
"If you would like to speak, I need to see a hand up, like we agreed. It doesn't work to have people cutting each other off."
- Use the goals, agenda, outcomes, activity at hand or other ways to refocus the group on the purpose of the time. Give participants an allotted time for particular discussions or activities.
"We're getting off track with this item. Remember our purpose is to decide a theme for the training; we can deal with the issue of space, but we need to make a separate time for that."
"Let's refocus - do people want a five minute break, then come back and get through this."
- An important tool can be to accept the statements of participants, even when emotional.
"That's a good point."
"It's clear that you have some very strong opinions about this. Let's keep thinking about how to turn these problems into solutions."
"Wow, that's an important point. Perhaps we should take five minutes to address that point before moving on. Does everyone agree?"
"That's a critical issue. Keep it in mind because we're going to talk about this a few items down our agenda."
- Humor, used right, can diffuse a tense situation. Allow for some laughter and good-natured joking.
- Don't be afraid to be direct. Being direct can be a useful technique when there is clear tension or resistance. Be prepared to deal with the answer.
"What's going on here?"
- Call a break. Have a stretch. Play a short game or do an icebreaker.

Resources & References

UIC College of Dentistry Small Group Learning Facilitator Manual

Indiana University School of Dentistry Facilitator Manual

Online Facilitator's Guide, Canadian Working Group on HIV and Rehabilitation (CWGHR) 2013

Barrow, Howard S. & Wee Keng Neo, L. (2010). Principles and Practice of **aPBL**. Revised Edition SIU School of Medicine Springfield, Ill.

Lakey, G. (2010) Facilitating Group learning: Strategies for Success with diverse Adult Learners. Jossey-Bass, A Wiley Imprint.

Savin-Baden, M. (2003). *Facilitating Problem-based Learning: Illuminating Perspectives*. The Society for Research into Higher Education & Open University Press.

Barrows, Howard S. (1998). The Essentials of Problem-Based Learning. *Journal of Dental Education*, v62 n9 p630-33.

Steinert, Y. (1996). Twelve tips for effective small-group teaching in the health professions, *Medical Teacher*, 18, 203-207.

Barrows, Howard S. (1988) *The Tutorial Process*. Revised Edition. SIU School of Medicine. Springfield, Ill.

Barrows H.S. & Tamblyn, R. M. (1980) *PROBLEM-BASED LEARNING: An Approach to Medical Education* Springer Publishing Company, New York.