GROUP PROCESSES AND FACILITATION HOW-TO

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Socrates: It isn't that knowing the answers myself, I perplex other people. The truth is rather that I infect them also with the perplexity I feel myself. (Plato 1958, p. 128)

No man can reveal to you aught but that which already lies half asleep in the dawning of your knowledge … If he is indeed wise he does not bid you enter the house of his wisdom, but rather leads you to the threshold of your own mind. (Gibran [1926] 1994, p. 67)

An unbending tree is easily broken. Students say afterwards to wise tutors: we did it ourselves. (Adapted from Lao Tsu 1973)

In the following pages you will find detailed advice on facilitating reflective writing groupwork, and mentoring. Principles, how to decide what a group should do and how, ground rules and boundaries, and so on are all authoritatively explained. Who holds authority and power in this work, how to make best use of silence, and psychological processes, are intriguingly described.

Good groups are formed with care, looked after knowledgeably, and terminated thoughtfully. The facilitation role is key: tutors teach how to start and support the process; their primary role is to create a facilitative environment for the group to enable its own process, and participants to take authority over their own work and writing. These pages offer detailed guidance on *how* to facilitate others to undertake the development they need at their own safe-enough pace.

A reflective and reflexive facilitator creates an environment where students lead themselves, so they take responsibility for their own reflection. Many find critical reflective practice hard, perhaps because it requires involvement of the whole practitioner (including emotions), leading many students to try to dodge the

responsibility, defensively complaining tutors should take authority, that facilitative approaches do not take sufficient control. Some imagine they can be filled with education without engaging themselves (Rowland's didactic pedagogic model, 1999). A reflective reflexive environment created by skilled, experienced facilitation enables practitioners or students to adopt reflective attitudes and reflexivity.

Facilitators *and* participants will find these pages useful. Participants can anticipate and support group processes productively, and gain more, by being aware of their own role, and that of others, and being alert to possibilities and potential. An effective group is run *for*, and largely *by*, its members. Participants are encouraged to consider and express what they want and need from the start, to discover and meet their own learning needs. We learn from our tutors, teachers and lecturers; we can learn far more from our peers. Group members can feel confident enough to engage in deep and wide-ranging enquiry. Facilitators keep them within boundaries and prevent straying, time-keep, and support a reasonable balance of contribution from everyone.

Introduction to facilitating critical reflective practice

Facilitating reflective practice leads to uncertainty, just as practising it does, like handling unpredictable fireworks. They might go off when the blue touch-paper is lit; but the direction or how they will explode into colour, light and sound is unknown. Attempting to reduce the uncertainty by creating firm structures to hold and contain students can block critical reflection reflexivity.

Together, tutor and students can commit themselves to perceiving key work and life events to focus upon, help students take responsibility for their own part in these incidents as they explore the narratives about them, critically engage with assumptions, values, and work principles, and do what they can to develop and alter things constructively. The most important achievable learning objective is active dynamic engagement.

> What is hard about the reflection is that it is so multi-layered. Analysis is of the actions, motivations, perceptions, etc. of the individual players in the story along with making links to other situations in the players' own past histories. But connections are also made at a more political and theoretic level of analysis which makes you then re-look at the original incident from another angle. No wonder it all takes so much time. (Ann, MMedSci student)

And no wonder it all takes so much trust in the group, a degree of self-confidence and faith in the professional self. These also all take time and nurturing, engendered in part by a safe-enough closed environment, agreed way of behaving, and time limit. A safe-enough boundaried confidential space can facilitate openness, willingness and courage. Course members have made statements such as: 'I have been able to be *me!*', and 'I have been able to say what I really *think!*', in evaluation. Perhaps even more pertinently: 'For the first time I have been able to express what I *feel!*'

This is based on dialogue, rather than debate or didactic discussion. Debate is oppositional: constructing intellectual arguments to win points. Participants in dialogue attempt to express what they think, feel and experience, and listen and respond attentively, in order to gain access to deeper understandings.

Facilitation takes commitment, skill, knowledge, willingness to work from the heart, and experience to know how to be the strong 'holder of the space for the group' (Miller 2005). This last can be demanding: enabling people to come into close and dynamic reflexive and reflective relationships safely and confidentially, and can require facilitators to hold groups' anxiety, fear or embarrassment until they are assuaged.

> Reflection is a real key to change, but facilitating good reflective learning experiences is probably more difficult than many anticipate. (Ann)

> It is easy for [practitioners] to work in almost total professional isolation, even in a friendly partnership, and it can be hard to admit to mistakes, vulnerability, sadness and even occasionally, joy. If you can commit some of these thoughts to paper, then not only can it be personally therapeutic, but by sharing them with others you may bring insights that can strike a chord and be of benefit to others. (Purdy 1996)

A course facilitator juggles with co-ordinating these three areas:
Needs of the group
Needs of the individual   Needs of the task/organisation

Ground rules and boundaries

A group can be powerfully facilitative if it can create its own rules: a relatively safe, warm island in life's choppy sea. Issues can be raised tentatively or hesitatingly, aired supportively, and then appropriately taken into the big world.

Facilitators create a safe enough space with firm boundaries where people can do this work, knowing 'we did it ourselves'. Participants share a specific part of themselves and their lives with each other. Miranda (Shakespeare's *The Tempest*) first met other people just when she was ready for a greater breadth of contact and experiences; she responded: 'O brave new world, that has such people in it' (V. i. ll. 183–4).

Many ingredients create appropriate boundaries to engender confidence and relative safety. Three are when members:

- take each other as they experience them within the closed culture of the group
- relate to and support each other without seeking to question beyond the boundaries of another's writing, and the group
- are aware that they do not expose themselves personally, but rather their writing, over which they have authority.

See Chapter 2 of *Reflective Practice: Writing and Professional Development* (Bolton, 2014) for a full examination of boundaries.

Group function

Initial clarity about what participants are there for, how they are going to do it, why, where and when, sets the scene. The group is likely to be organic, with working aims, objectives, duration, patterns and relationships developing over time, but some initial agreement helps. Some things will be determined in advance, especially if the sessions are part of a course. But these circumstances can make it even more vital to create a safe enough, clear enough space for people to feel confident to work in.

Working reflexively and reflectively will be new to many who expect traditional teacher-led classes (didactic teaching). Reflective practice courses offer support in professional and personal enquiry to:

- understand more clearly the import and implications of specific experiences
- discover learning needs
- enable the sharing of sensitive issues with involved, supportive, disinterested peers
- reinforce the self-confidence and self-esteem which writing tends to bring
- support occasional low confidence, writer's block, and lost way.

The group is *not*:

- a writers' workshop, where the *form* rather than the *content* of the writing is constructively criticised with publication in mind: the content of the writing is considered to be less important in such a forum
- a therapeutic writing group, where the content of the writing is focused upon to support the writer personally
- a chat group, where responses might be: 'how nice, now that reminds me how my Auntie Gwen used to …'.

The life of a group

The experience of being in a group is different at different stages: a courtly dance, then jive, quickstep, country dance or tarantella. Or it is a story authored by all group members with a classic 'plot' structure of: *Meeting, Falling in love, Lovers' tiff* or *Conflict, Kiss and make up* or *Conflict resolution, Mission* (lovers win over their parents – or don't, *End* (lovers sail off into the sunset,or die) and *Mourning*. A group changes and develops; the duration and shape of the 'plot' will vary for different groups:

Stages in the Life of a Group

At *Meeting*, members begin to see themselves as a group rather than a collection of individuals. They find out about each other with reserve, avoidance of conflict and politeness; few personal risks are taken, and views and feelings are withheld.

Falling in love is the initial stage of excitement and beginning of commitment.

Conflict is the traditional 'middle day' when the group has constituted itself and perhaps feels rather congratulatory. Members provisionally sort out roles, flex role muscles and jockey for leadership perhaps, or push preferred objectives. People can become quite badly hurt in this process if not handled carefully. Argument might be a route to finding out more about boundaries and each other: Precisely what are we doing here? Who am I in this group? What do I want to get out of it? People may be defensive, assertive, distrustful and suspicious, and not listen to each other.

Conflict resolution is about creating group identity and rules, developing commitment, as well as wanting to nurture and care for both group and each other. Participants are supportive and receptive, and attempt to avoid conflict.

In *Mission*, the group has tackled each other, uncovered quite a few prejudices to sidestep, and strengths and skills to harness. They have a reasonable group feel for who they are, what it is they are doing, why and how, and when and where they are doing it. They work well together, have mutual understanding and are doing whatever it was they set out to do; or something else which has become more important. They are open (enough), trusting, forbearing, supportive, listening well, and willing to take risks.

End is when the group has done its work and moves on gracefully: with regret and optimism about the next stage for each. Members leave: once more individuals. A 'rite of passage', such as a shared lunch, can ease the parting.

Facilitators might not be aware of *Mourning*. An effective supportive group is bound to leave a sense of regret at its passing.

These stages are simplistic, as for any model, and might get mixed up: earlier stages, even if undergone thoroughly, may recur. Conflict may arise at any time and need to be dealt with (lovers continue to tiff, kiss and make up). New rules and guidelines may be discussed. The group may even go back to elements of the first stage and need to get to know each other again in areas which seemed unimportant at *Meeting*. *Mission* is reached after at least some elements of the previous stages. All the relationships depicted are within the boundaries of the group: individuals meeting outside the group's boundaries may knife or kiss each other.

> The group has enabled me to share my writing over the last six years in a supportive and creative environment. This has helped me to both explore and make sense of some of the experiences and challenges of my life. I have improved my confidence and ability to write creatively and have been enriched by the range and depth of poetry and prose which each member has brought. (Shirley)

> There have been times when I've brought a piece of writing and decided not to read it – the circumstances have simply not been 'right'. And this feels acceptable – comfortable – because the group is sensitive to the mood engendered by each person's writing. I think we have learned to 'hear' better and this has informed our writing. The whole process is evolving all the time. (Becky)

> I find the process of listening to someone read intensely moving, knowing something of the life from which the writing comes. It helps me know the person more fully. It really is a unique way of sharing. (Sheena)

The space created by the group is: supportive, constructive, safe, facilitative, confidential, free from jargon and (almost) free from b****cks. (Mark)

Characters

A group, just like a story, also relies on character: the talkative and exuberant, the shy and quiet, the silent but anguished, dominant and bossy, analytic reasoner, facilitative, divergently creative thinker, moaner, kindly and motherly, frustrated rescuer, frightened pupil, babbler, lurker, catalyst, logical structurer, teacher's pet. Troubles sometimes arise when a group contains two or more habitually dominant people; different problems arise when too many are shy and quiet (or even worse, anguished and quiet). Facilitators can gently and subtly encourage members to try new roles.

Different roles may be played in different groups, as in life: mum one minute, teacher or lover the next. A Master's student, described as 'facilitative' in a reflexive group discussion, was astonished, a bit fearful and kept referring to it. We supported her in thinking it was all right for her to be facilitative, to valuably extend her notion of herself and her skills and experience. Until then she had assumed a whacky role, with creative ideas, but had to have the more serious elements of the course explained carefully. The 'game', leading to this enlightenment, was participants likening each other to animals. We then gently and cautiously teased out what we thought our metaphorical animals might signify.

The facilitator also assumes roles as appropriate and with discretion, being a 'good enough facilitator', taking on each character just 'enough' of the time. He or she may be any of the following:

Teacher: Giving a keynote talk on an essential issue. Too much engenders passivity and lack of group responsibility for learning.

Instructor: For a set task, such as writing to a certain theme for a certain length of time. Responsibility for everything else is removed, freeing participants to be creatively explorative and expressive in their writing in an environment of enough trust and support.

Interpreter: Reflecting back a contribution, repeating it in the facilitator's own words in order to clarify and ensure it has been heard; or interpreting behaviours; or making connections or linkages between concepts or ideas. This pattern-making or pattern-perceiving can be creative and constructive, but not too often.

Devil's advocate/ confronter: Appropriate in certain circumstances. Groups need to be challenged enough, but not too much.

Compatriot/ discloser: Groups in which members reveal themselves, but facilitators never do, will not work. Nor should they cross boundaries by revealing all their skeletons, taking up the group's emotional space and time.

Consultant: Giving information or advice from the facilitator's knowledge and experience.

Neutral chairperson: This role makes sure the group keeps to the point, and to time, that everyone has a say, that the subject is appropriately and thoroughly aired, that sexism, racism, and 'big white chiefism' do not happen, that ground rules are respected, that discussion is appropriately recorded, and is not primarily involved in discussions or activities.

Participant: Opposite to chairperson, a useful role on occasion. It creates a warm, coherent sense; the skill is to not lose sight of essential facilitator roles. Members new to group processes think facilitators are participants much of the time, without noticing the chairing, interpretive, confronting and some directive functions.

Manager: Undertakes essential but unexciting organisational and management tasks, ensuring participants arrive at the right time, place and with the right papers and expectations.

Boundaries between these roles are blurred, in practice. Participants rarely perceive experienced facilitators moving between them. Problems can arise, however, if participants expect one role from their facilitator and they are in another; this generally only arises when values, principles and models are inconsistent with students' expectations (see Chapter 2).

Authority and power

The facilitator is always in an authoritative, even powerful, role . A group trusts him or her to retain awareness of this, and wield it responsibly, confidentially and ethically. Forgetting and being *participant* too much is as dangerous as becoming *dictator*. Hughes and Pengelly add:

> Trainers need to… face the full extent of their managerial authority and of the potential impact of this on the functioning of participants. The more they know about their own authority, the less they are likely either to deny it and collude with participants in avoiding powerful learning experiences, or wield it unthinkingly and impose rigid, unresponsive courses… The more open trainers are about the extent and limits of their own authority, the more open they can be to the professional and personal authority of course participants. (1995, pp. 169–70)

Facilitators can make errors, which need careful handling. A university therapist wrote about a childhood bereavement at one of my day courses. The small group sat stunned at the privilege of hearing such limpid, clear writing full of meaning, clearly of such value to themselves and the writer. The writer said he could never have intended to write it, and would not have done so if I had not forgotten to mention they would be asked to read their writing out loud to the group. He had

felt secure in the privacy of paper and pen. I was on poor form, my daughter seriously injured in hospital and my mother having just died. I was lucky: he forgave me, and they all benefited from him reading it. Here follows an example of a tutor ensuring her students retain their own authority within a group:

> Critical reflection encourages the questioning of traditional classroom authority. Changing the way authority plays out in the classroom may disturb some students, and it will likely challenge the teacher to question assumptions about his or her own role … A [MBA] student volunteered how much money the entire class had wasted sitting through three useless classes full of vague discussions of the purpose of business and management. He wanted concrete and structured solutions: 'Where were the facts and answers?' Nodding to acknowledge I heard him, I personally was shocked by his strong assertions, troubled by his assumptions that all agreed with him, and more than a little worried that he was right. Vying for time, I asked others for their thoughts while I quietly figured out how I would respond. Then, I remembered I did not need to respond. That was not my job. So I was silent and left a space for learning.

> Students rallied around the course, sharing how much their thinking had changed and how they had brought ideas into their work environments to prove relevance and worth. What happened most profoundly is that we all learned during this reflective process. Others had certainly felt the same as the student who originally spoke, but were afraid to voice their thoughts. It was a raw, honest moment of frustration and a great learning opportunity. We were open to sharing our ideas and opinions and thoughts, even to challenging our beliefs about learning. This looked like critical reflection to me, and it was an example of how we shaped our meaning through public reflection. (Hedberg 2009, pp. 30–1)

Despite such challenges, most often student reactions are positive and encouraging. This can create a different type of danger, however; one where the process easily becomes a mutual exchange of platitudes, or even of tutor-worship.

Silence

Silence is powerful in any group, particularly an interactive, confidential group discussing deeply held principles and vital experiences. Skilled facilitation wields silence powerfully: tutors who are fearful of it miss an invaluable resource. 'The leader must learn to allow for different sorts of silence – the reflective, the anxious, the embarrassed or puzzled' (Abercrombie 1993, p. 118), the thoughtful, angry or portentous. For a useful exploration of silence, see Rowland 1993, pp. 87–107. Silence feels supportive and reflexive if participants are responsible for their group, with authority over their own contribution; if not, silence can feel confronting and aggressive.

Silence, handled wisely and carefully, can be used fruitfully for deep reflection. If no one in the group has anything particular they need to say, then no one needs to speak. The silence is broken when someone has something to say, however tentative. A silence might be used, for example, to allow previous words to sink in, and an appropriate ensuing response sought. Understandings and clarities do not necessarily emerge through argument or discourse.

When a participant has read their writing, a silence might well ensue: this can be fruitful, allowing listeners to marshal their thoughts and feelings before speaking. The one who has just read their writing needs to perceive this brief silence as positive. A new anxious group needs the facilitator to support listeners to say something positive quickly, having heard a piece, as new writers feel exposed on reading their work. A participant rather than facilitator breaking this silence tends to increase group responsibility. I never break silence when someone's read their writing; the discussion belongs to the group, and needs to be started by them. If I, as facilitator, break the silence, undue weight is placed on my words.

More can be said by silence than words: 'a long heavy silence promises danger, just as much as a lot of empty outcries' (Sophocles 1982, l. 1382), and Aeschylus pointed out that safety and discretion can reside in silence: 'Long ago we learned to keep our mouths shut/Where silence is good health, speech can be fatal' (1999, p. 29).

> Silence is but a feeling silence. Someone has just finished reading their contribution – perhaps a difficult encounter with a patient or a partner or even memories of training and hospital days which still have the power to hurt. The group has lived through that moment with the speaker, shared the emotions, and for a few minutes there is nothing to say. We are amazed at the power of each other's writing.
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> Certainly when we come down to discuss, with Gillie's help, there are ways that the writing could be made more telling, but the inspiration comes from the group. It is not afraid to face the feelings aroused daily in medical practice and is learning in the safety of the group to translate them into words. (Naomi)

Psychological processes

A reflexive reflective facilitator is an educator, not a therapist or analyst; certain insightful understandings can however be borrowed from psychotherapeutic theory and practice. 'It is helpful and probably essential that coaches and mentors [facilitators and tutors] have some awareness of psychological processes' (Garvey et al. 2009, p. 165).

We *transfer* elements from other relationships; students sometimes transfer feelings which belong to their relationships with their parents or long-ago school teachers. Bewilderingly inappropriate anger or attachment can suddenly arise, seemingly out of the blue. In *counter-transference*, facilitators react similarly inappropriately, treating a disruptive member like a naughty son, for example. *Projection* is when emotions are projected inappropriately: 'I'm sure you are getting at me', might mean 'I really wish I could get at you'. In *introjection*, feelings, such as anger, are swallowed and not expressed, possibly leading to them erupting inappropriately heavily later. All these happen all the time in everyday life. A facilitator has responsibility to take them into account. Awareness can explain why anger or tears erupt out of nowhere, disrupting the whole group process.

A participant launched a blistering attack expressing dissatisfaction with the group process, wanting *to be taught*. The student was transferring on to the tutor negative feelings about teachers, becoming a naughty, angry school child. An experienced facilitator knows such behaviour is not personal, and is able to continue calmly, explaining the process, and to continue the session. The group will then take over and control the obstreperous member: they do not want their time wasted by naughty school children (see also Hedberg 2009 above).

> One of the reasons people seem able to open themselves up in these sessions is that Gillie imposes nothing of herself when she suggests the writing. The suggestions for writing and introductory words are very open and opening, with no way of doing it suggested, nor definite subjects, etc. (MMedSci student)

Group management

Groups do not happen; they are created and nurtured. Members can be supported to take responsibility for their own group functions, and share tentative, border ideas, feelings and memories with authority and confidence:

> *Knowing each other's names*. Beginning with a warm-up exercise (see below) helps people feel integrated and involved. A second session could begin with practising knowing names using a quick, light team enhancing strategy.

> A *formative evaluation* or *reflexive period* to conclude each session, to check on group satisfaction, personal sense of involvement, needs and wants (for excellent examples, see Hedberg 2009). Careful facilitation helps people stand outside themselves and their group for a space, in order to be more aware of the rules, values, unspoken assumptions and so on they bring to the sessions: enabling appropriate redefining of boundaries and rules.

> *Timing*: beginning and ending when expected. Time needs allocating carefully so each participant has their share to read and discuss their writing. Confidence in this fosters respect, responsibility and security, and good use of everyone's energy.

> *Variety of group size and organisation* aids dynamics. Short periods of paired and small-group work can enable closer trust; quiet or well-defended participants can contribute more, and dominant ones less.

> Awareness of the range of roles (*characters*) the participants and facilitator can take on, as well as transference, projection and so on (see above).

> *Verbal contributions from all* as appropriate. Less voluble or silent members can be encouraged, and dominant ones to listen by mixing the group format with periods of reflexivity, paired work, small-group work, plenary, as well as appropriate subtle facilitation to help participant awareness of the value of contribution.

> *Problematic participants* can usually be coped with *by the group* with careful facilitation, leading to greater group cohesion.

> *Open questions*: 'How did you feel about that?', not closed: 'Did that make you angry?'

Use of personal pronouns. Instead of saying '*I…*', people sometimes say '*You* get tired of saying it over again', or '*we*' instead of '*I*' (an assumption the group agrees). The use of 'I' responsibly can develop appropriate authority.

Using individuals' *names* appropriately increases inclusion and value.

An awareness of the power of *sub-groups*.

Non-verbal communications (facial expression, posture, gesture, blushing, sweating, laughter, crying, and so on) are very informative.

Who comments first, and when after a reading? It is never me: as facilitator I can readily dominate and inhibit participant contributions. I speak after everyone else, having asked for a quick response for the sake of a new writer. A deeply thoughtful pause as the group reflects on what they have heard and want to say, can prelude a fruitful discussion in an established, confident group, to which I add a few final words.

The door-knob. Just as the session ends, participants may blurt out disturbing or vital information. Firm time boundaries, aiming to finish in advance of time, and a reflexive formative evaluation at the session end can help.

Listening to, commenting on, and eliciting comments reflectively on the written experiences of others is a skill to be fostered, enabled and modelled by facilitation.

Learning how to take the comments and discussions of others about writings needs practice and confidence building. Facilitative, stretching or surprising points come from participants. Group and facilitator have the responsibility to support writers in extending and clarifying their *own* ideas, not to impose views.

Housekeeping

I keep six honest serving men

(They taught me all I knew);

Their names are What and Why and When

And How and Where and Who. (Kipling 1902, p. 83)

These servants have served me well for years, too. I call them *can-opener questions*. Used as a checklist in planng and writing, they help ensure I have covered everything. Here are practical suggestions for managing a large group which has to be divided into several small groups of 5 or 6:

How: King Arthur thought *sitting in a circle* helps everyone feel equal. When only classroom chairs are available, packed in round a table, people lean forward, creating a gathered circle. Some feel, however, a centre table can be a barrier.

Where: *the right number of chairs* makes a group feel complete. Leaving the chair of an absent but expected member can retain a sense of their presence. A group referred to Jenny's empty chair as if she were present; then, when she came in apologetically but expectedly late, slipping into her waiting chair she felt warm and wanted.

What: *necessary equipment* being in place beforehand saves wastage of valuable time.

When: *punctuality and regular attendance* can offer a sense of respect, as well as saving time and frustration.

Who: *group size* affects dynamics. A group of more than ten is best divided into small groups of five or six sitting round separate (preferably round) tables.

How: *funds* – who pays what, when, how, how much, to whom (if appropriate).

Where: *venue* – is it right? Can you make it more right if it's not perfect?

When: *coffee time* – important because people get to know each other. But when, where, how long?

When: *timing* – people like to know at the beginning when they will get their breaks (coffee, tea, lunch) and when they will finish. Energy and commitment are parcelled unconsciously for the allotted time: extra time can be useless as energy is used up; finishing early leaves frustrated unused energy.

Why: this chapter doesn't cover *Why? – Reflective Practice* (Bolton, 2014) does that.

Maureen Rappaport, medical lecturer, reflects on her teaching:

How can I arrange a series of teaching sessions, or one session, where others feel safe to expose parts of themselves and explore their own experiences, their cutting edges of learning, a place where the learning is raw, but a place we learn from? The edge is where our professional experiences, grounded and guided by mentors, cut into our own beliefs, and values, and boy, do they hurt.

I have been experimenting with different groups and various methods. It is hard to keep the group focused on the writing and meanings and not on making their peers 'feel better'. I, too, have to fight against my natural tendencies to 'save' my students when they express difficult feelings and emotions, although I am perfectly comfortable sharing my uncomfortable feelings with them.

Finding my own voice in writing has been so powerful: I'm afraid of smothering others'. It's time to listen to students' and residents' (registrar or trainee doctors) voices, through poetry and literature and writing among other things. The residents teach me so much. I hope I give as much back to them. It's like the magic between my patients and I. I look up at their sharp minds and clever reason. What do I want to learn?

It never ceases to amaze me that the residents are more self-aware and more self-reflective than I give them credit for. I ask them to write about a meaningful event in their training (20 minutes of keeping the hand moving). Here is Al, 1st year family medicine resident's writing:

I was called down to emergency on my surgery rotation. I was to see a I thought she was a he, so I got confused.

I approached the patient, a 24-year-old African-American woman with cerebral palsy. I introduced myself and began my history. She couldn't speak clearly and mumbled her words. It was obvious she depended on others for her care. I began asking her father questions. After a while she mumbled something and her father started laughing. When I asked what she said, he said, 'she says why don't you just ask me the questions?'

I was shocked and ashamed. I apologised to her and began our conversation. Although difficult to understand I made out her words and realised how direct and concise she was. She was also witty and kept cracking up her dad. At one point I had to stop my 'history' and said, 'I'm sorry, but I just have to say you are one of the most inspiring and amazing people I have ever met'. Despite all the crap in medicine, just the fact that I got to meet her makes it all worth it.

Al (Maureen Rappaport)

Drumming

A skilled facilitator, just like any expert practitioner, is not generally conscious of the kinds of issues covered in this chapter: they work intuitively (or with phronesis, see Frank 2004). But even an expert facilitator makes mistakes, has to learn a new method or technique. It can feel dangerous: emotions, feelings and opinions can be expressed and felt with vigour when groups focus on vital issues. A participant said: 'The responsibility for encouraging reflection is awesome'. If effective learning is to take place, that level of responsibility needs to be taken:

High value is given to creating a space which is somewhat apart from the everyday world, where a reflective mode and a slower pace is promoted, and where it is permissible to allow vulnerability to surface (a view somewhat at odds with the dominant ideas of competence and 'mastery'). (Yelloly and Henkel 1995, p. 9)

Facilitating an effective group offers immense satisfaction: experiencing people developing, growing, reaching fresh understandings, and learning how to support each other. Effective group work is like learning to drum collaboratively in rhythm. This is the metaphor a student used for reflective practice:

Rhythm, seamless, breathless, captivating. Ah ha! We do have rhythm. We can do it! Circle of faces, my friends.

Rhythm of the heart, of the step, of the circulation of the blood. Change of the seasons. Night and day. Springtime and harvest. Marching, dancing, walking, skipping, running, jumping, talking, poetry. (Jenny Lockyer)

Creating a facilitated environment for a group to reflect and be critically reflexive enables them to communicate with each other in a way which would be difficult or impossible under other circumstances.

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