

Preparing facilitators for experiential education: The role of intentionality and intuition.

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Abstract

A facilitator is considered to act intentionally when they are deliberate about what they are doing and can provide rationales for their actions. The same facilitator is said to practice intuitively when they are not able to articulate a clear rationale for their actions, yet they are still able to facilitate effectively. A review of the facilitation literature and the experiential education literature demonstrates the importance of both intentionality and intuitive processes when facilitating. However, rather than presenting these important aspects of facilitation dichotomously, this paper describes the need for both of them to be present in facilitator education, albeit in tension with each other. The findings of a naturalistic inquiry into the theories and practices of seven facilitator educators are presented. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and participant observation with the facilitator educators, and qualitative surveys with a sample of their course graduates. The study confirmed the importance of an emphasis on both intentionality and intuition in the preparation of facilitators for experiential education.

Watching an excellent facilitator working with a difficult group in an experiential education program can be both inspiring and depressing. Inspiring - because of the skillful way they are able to manage the challenging aspects of group facilitation. Depressing - because they highlight the discrepancy between excellent group facilitation and the sort of attempts we lesser mortals often make at facilitating. How do excellent facilitators do it? How do they know which intervention to use, when to push, when to wait, when to do nothing? You don't have to be a novice to wrestle with these questions and nor am I suggesting that facilitators should strive for facilitation perfection. However, this paper is based on the assumption that most facilitators would like to facilitate more effectively than we sometimes seem able to.

Excellent facilitators would probably be able to give you a rationale for most choices they make when facilitating a group. However, it is also likely that sometimes the same facilitators will tell you they just went with a hunch and it seemed to work. The purpose of this paper is to explore the importance of *intentionality* and *intuition* when facilitating groups in experiential education and to suggest how we can develop these abilities further. To do this I will draw on the facilitation literature, the experiential education literature, and the findings of a recent study (Thomas, 2007), which described the theories and practices of facilitator educators.

A framework for understanding facilitator education.

Previously, Thomas (2004; 2005) categorised the different approaches to training and educating facilitators into the four dimensions of facilitator education shown in Figure 1. The four dimensions provided a language and structure to interpret and make sense of the approaches to facilitator education outlined in the literature and observed in the study. Technical Facilitator Education approaches

are skills based and formulaic, whereas Intentional Facilitator Education approaches are purposively grounded in theory. Person-centered Facilitator Education approaches are intentional but they also emphasize the attitudes, personal qualities, or presence of the facilitator. Finally, Critical Facilitator Education approaches encompass the other dimensions but also seek to raise an awareness of the political nature of facilitation. This paper is most concerned with the intentional facilitator education dimension (for example, Luckner & Nadler, 1997; Martin, Cashel, Wagstaff, & Breunig, 2006; Priest, Gass, & Gillis, 2000; Priest & Gass, 2005; Sugerman, Doherty, Garvey, & Gass, 2000).

Giddens' (1984) *Theory of Structuration*, is relevant to the consideration of intentionality in facilitator education practice, and provides a useful framework for the discussion which follows in this paper. Giddens argued that structures are both constituted by people, and at the same time those social structures are the very medium of that constitution. Applying Giddens' ideas to facilitation, facilitator educators contribute to the production and reproduction of facilitators in three ways. First, facilitators can be encouraged to practice with *discursive consciousness*, which means they can give a coherent explanation for the things they do. Second, facilitators can operate at the level of *practical consciousness*, which means that they know tacitly how to teach but may have difficulty articulating or describing the reasons for their actions. Finally, in the lowest level of practice, *unconsciousness*, a facilitator is not able to articulate the rationale for his or her actions.

A facilitator is considered to act *intentionally* when they are deliberate about what they are doing and can provide rationales for their actions, as in Giddens' level of discursive consciousness. This type of explicit intentionality is demonstrated in the dialogue used,

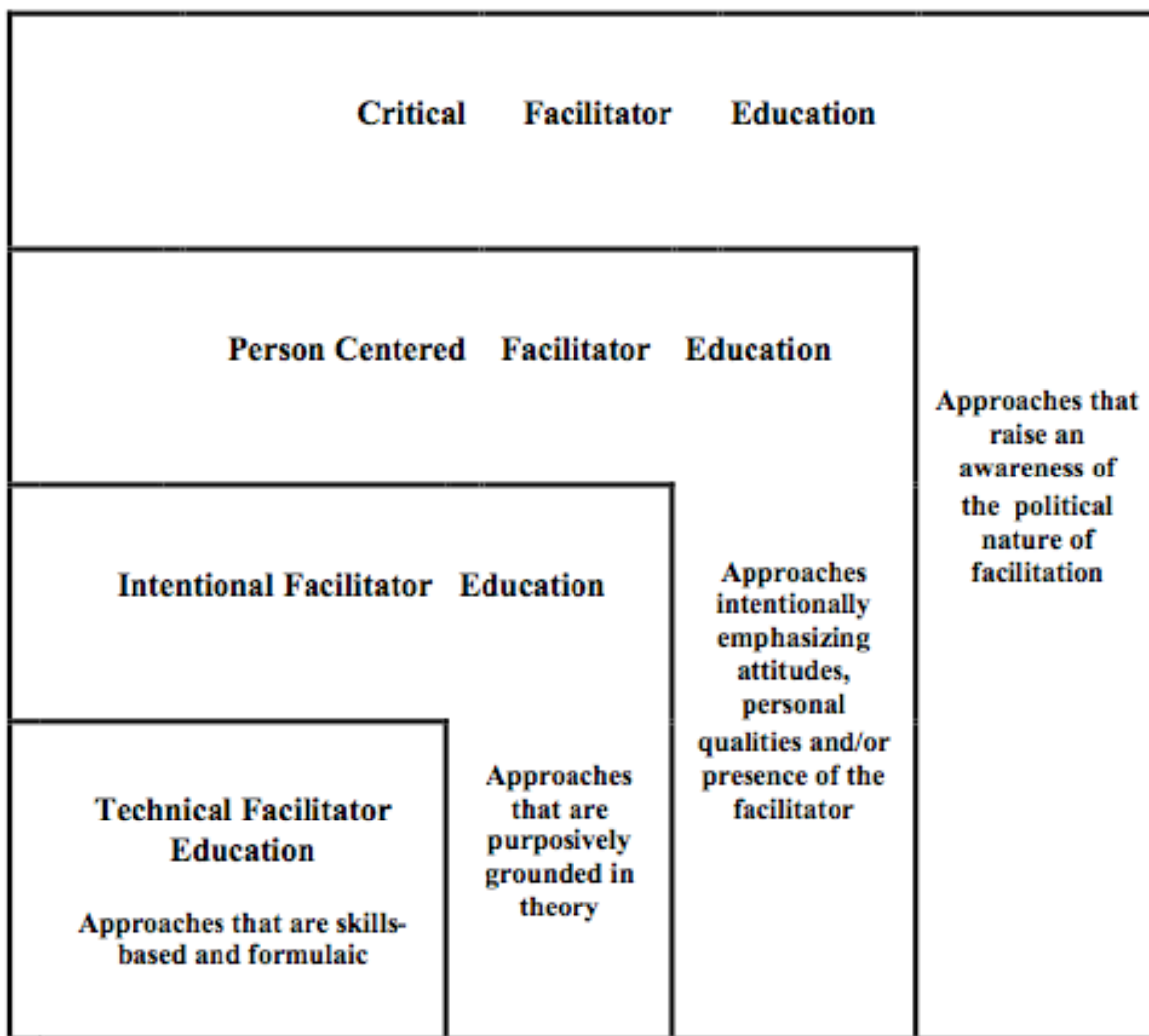


Figure 1. Dimensions of facilitator education model (Thomas, 2005).

through an awareness of the process, by making otherwise hidden processes explicit, by encouraging an awareness of personal stances, and by modeling desired behaviours (Brockbank & McGill, 1998). The term intuition is used in this paper to describe the circumstances when an experienced facilitator is not able to articulate a clear rationale for their actions, yet they are still able to facilitate effectively. In this respect, such practice is akin to Giddens’ level of practical consciousness. This paper will report on the findings of the study concerning the role of intentional and intuitive processes when preparing facilitators to work in the field of experiential education. Before describing the methodology of the study reported on in this paper, a review of the facilitation literature and the experiential education literature will be provided with particular reference to the dimension of intentional facilitator education.

The discussion of intentionality in the general facilitation literature

There has been a growing interest in facilitation in recent times, which Hogan (2002) attributes to a growth in participatory approaches to management, shifts towards more student-focused learning in formal educational settings, increased use of groups in therapeutic settings, the growth of community development, the growth of mediation as a preferred approach to conflict management and dispute resolution, and the emergence of focus groups and co-operative inquiry in qualitative research. Correspondingly, the body of facilitation literature is growing and numerous authors describe the importance of facilitating intentionally. Schwarz’s (2002; 2005) *Skilled Facilitator Approach* is a good example because his approach is based on a set of core values, assumptions, and principles. Schwarz integrated theory and practice and explained,

You not only need a set of methods and techniques but also an understanding of how and why they work . . . you see the reasoning that underlies each technique and method . . . you can improvise and design new methods and techniques consistent with the core values . . . you can discuss your approach with clients so they can make informed choices about choosing you as a facilitator. (Schwarz, 2002, p. 9)

Schwarz (2002) stated that a facilitator’s effectiveness or ineffectiveness stems from the core values and assumptions that he or she holds. Through the *Skilled Facilitator Approach*, Schwarz aimed to help facilitators understand how their own thinking could lead them to act ineffectively in ways that they were normally unaware of: for example, by uncritically borrowing methods and techniques from a variety of other approaches and basing them on conflicting values and principles.

Schwarz’s (2002) approach to facilitator education is grounded on the work of Argyris and Schön (1996) and he adopted their concept of *theory-in-action* to explore what guides a facilitator’s interventions. This approach distinguishes between *espoused theory* and *theory-in-use*. Espoused theory is how a facilitator says he or she would act in a given situation. In contrast, theory-in-use is what the facilitator actually does and it has a powerful effect on the facilitator because theory-in-use operates quickly, effortlessly, and outside his or her level of awareness. Schwarz explained that when facilitators find themselves in an embarrassing or tough situation with a group it is not uncommon for them to activate just one theory-in-use to guide their behaviour and this often leads to ineffective facilitation. In these cases the facilitators are often blind to the inconsistencies between their espoused theory and their theory-in-use. Hence, in conditions of low favourability the facilitator’s theory-in-use will potentially override any new behaviour that lacks a corresponding change in thinking patterns. This explains why technical facilitator education approaches that only teach techniques to improve facilitation may not work in difficult situations.

Schwarz (2002) suggested that there are two levels of learning that facilitators need to engage in concurrently: learning how to change their thoughts and feelings so they can create conversation that is more productive and creates less defensiveness; and learning to reflect rigorously on and redesign core values and assumptions in order to think differently and use his (Schwarz’s) ground rules effectively. Schwarz recommended facilitators slowly increase the range and length of difficult facilitation situations in which they practice operating from their espoused theory. With appropriate reflection and guidance, emerging facilitators should get better at reducing the gap between their espoused theory and their theory-in-use (Schwarz, 2002).

Killion and Simmons (1992) encouraged facilitators “to go beyond the application of new skills, knowledge, and practices . . . [and] adopt the belief system of facilitators” (p. 2). They claimed that the challenge when educating a facilitator is to help people to move from the mindset of a trainer to the *Zen* of facilitation. They explained that the *Zen* of facilitation is not a religious practice, but rather a strong set of beliefs that drive a facilitator’s choices and actions. Killion and Simmons’ three essential beliefs for *Zen* type facilitators included: a trust in the group’s ability to find its own direction and resolution, a belief that a sense of community creates a forum for group work, and an avoidance of preconceived notions.

Heron (1999) emphasised the importance of developing *facilitator style* which he defined as “the distinctive way that a person leads any group,” and this style is a “function of the facilitator’s values and norms, psychological make up, degree of skill and development, of the objectives and composition of the group, and of a wider cultural context” (p. 13). Priest, Gass and Gillis (2000) also encouraged facilitators to clarify their own personal belief systems and to develop knowledge of organisational development theories in their book, ‘*The Essential Elements of Facilitation*.’

Intentionality in the experiential education literature

The adventure education and outdoor learning fields have demonstrated a keen interest in facilitation, but the facilitation knowledge, principles and skills developed within these fields appears to have occurred independently of the broader facilitation field. An examination of some of the references to facilitator intentionality within the literature in the experiential education and adventure education fields follows.

Priest and Gass (2005) dedicate four chapters of their revised ‘*Effective Leadership in Adventure Programming*’ text to the discussion of facilitation concepts, frameworks, models and skills. Their model of effective adventure programming leadership, which has facilitation skills and theory as a primary emphasis, also articulates the need for a foundational understanding of the philosophy, history, and social psychology of adventure programming. Hence, Priest and Gass recommend facilitators base their practice on sound principles and theories, despite the overuse of the term ‘skills’ to describe leadership competencies in their text.

The text by Martin, Cashel, Wagstaff, and Breunig (2006), titled ‘*Outdoor Leadership: Theory and Practice*,’ set out to help prospective outdoor leaders to “find the middle ground between theory and practice that does not appear to exist in the texts that are currently available” (p. ix). Martin et al., provided a list of eight core competencies of effective outdoor leadership including ‘teaching and facilitation.’ Within this competency they outline the need for outdoor leaders to develop an understanding of facilitation styles, skills, and

underpinning theories of human development and group development.

We learn our craft by understanding the foundations of or theories associated with leadership, group development, and facilitation. We learn by being self-aware – knowing our own abilities and limitations – by knowing how we interact with small groups of people and how we affect change in a larger organization. (Martin et al., 2006, p. 101)

Although, facilitation literature based on empirical research is rare, an ethnomethodological study of facilitation in an outdoor education setting by Brown (2002; 2003; 2004) is a noteworthy exception. Brown found that facilitators frequently assumed the role of ‘gatekeeper,’ controlling what were supposed to be student-centered discussions. In this respect, the facilitators in his study played a “central role in creating and limiting opportunities for discussion, for evaluating student contributions and in collaboration with students to construct and articulate acceptable knowledge” (Brown, 2002, p. 111). These findings are problematic because they demonstrate a non-critical practice of facilitation, which is what intentional facilitator education seeks to discourage.

Luckner and Nadler (1997) argued that facilitators have a responsibility to develop both the knowledge and skills to facilitate participants’ transfer of learning. To maximize their effectiveness, facilitators need to understand that the “better we understand the factors that influence learning and the processes that underlie it, the better we can design experiences that will benefit individuals” (Luckner & Nadler, 1997, p. xvi). However, they also suggest that facilitation is an ‘artful science’ and they acknowledge the potential role of intuition. The next section will explore the place of intuitive processes in facilitation.

The place of intuition in facilitator education

Much of what teachers and others do, in the heat of the moment, is not premeditated; it is intuitive. A situation arises; the teacher responds, and only later, if at all, will she or he pause to ‘figure out’ what was going on, and why they did what they did. (T. Atkinson & Claxton, 2000, p. 2)

Intuitive processes can be observed in everyday learning experiences and the use of intuition by teachers need not be considered obscure, mythical or grandiose (Claxton, 2000). Drawing on a comprehensive review of the literature, Claxton (2000) described some of the key facets of intuition in the following ways. Intuition is a different way of knowing, not reliant on articulate fluency, and involves a more holistic appreciation of the relationships between various elements of a situation. Intuitive abilities are a function of the experience of the

knower, include emotional involvement, and are not reliant on conscious mental processes, and may therefore, be potentially unavailable for introspection. Claxton also explains that intuitive processes often come with a built-in confidence rating or a subjective feeling of rightness.

Schön’s (1988) concept of a *knowing-in-action* suggested that not all professional practice can be justified using a verbal description, and that it is perhaps not useful to always require it. Schön noted that sometimes the “meanings of publicly observable performance remain stubbornly ambiguous” (p. 301) and that undiscussability and indescribability can reinforce each other. In a later work, Schön (1995) argued that there is nothing strange about the idea that there is a kind of knowing inherent in intelligent action and that “our bias towards thinking blinds us to the non-logical processes which are omnipresent in effective practice” (p. 52). Strangely, there is not extensive discussion of this kind of practice within the facilitation literature.

Ghais (2005) encouraged facilitators to use their intuition to offer hypothetical insights and she argued that a facilitator’s intuitive capacity is a “remarkable human ability that’s waiting to be tapped in helping groups deal with extreme challenges” (p. 229). Hunter, Bailey and Taylor (1999) also acknowledged that “being connected with and using your intuition is essential as a facilitator” (p. 76) and that facilitators will often need to act in the moment, without the luxury of time to think or reflect rationally. Luckner and Nadler (1997) also lend support for the place of intuition in facilitation,

because experiential approaches to learning, training and therapy require each of us to make numerous, instantaneous decisions based on new information as well as rely on our intuition and previous experiences, there will never be a recipe for processing that can be handed down from one professional to the next. (p. xvi)

The role of intuition, or unconscious processes, in decision making has been researched by Gladwell (2005) and the application to facilitator education is strong. Gladwell called the part of our brain that allows for fast decision making the “adaptive unconscious” (p. 11) and it works quickly and quietly to process a lot of the data we need in order to function effectively as human beings. He described how making decisions very quickly can in some cases be as effective as making decisions cautiously and deliberately and that “our snap judgments and first impressions can be educated and controlled” (p. 15). Gladwell explained that fast decision making, or rapid cognition, uses a process that he calls *thin slicing*, which he defined as “the ability of our unconscious to find patterns in situations and behaviour based on very narrow slices of experience” (p. 23).

A group facilitator has large amounts of external and internal data to process in very short periods of time. Therefore, Gladwell’s (2005) thin slicing is applicable to

the complex situations that facilitators must contend with when leading groups. However, the idea that the evidence facilitators may use to make decisions is buried somewhere in their unconscious and that they are unable to “dredge it up” (Gladwell, 2005, p. 50), may be difficult for some facilitators to accept. Gladwell (2005) also argued that there are times when an explanation for a decision really is not possible and the responses some people give for their decisions just do not make sense. This perspective was shared by Claxton (2000) who explained that “Thinking about what you are doing, or consciously monitoring what you are doing, as you are doing it, can be deleterious” (p. 35).

The literature also offers some cautions about the use of intuition, which facilitators of experiential education should consider. Eraut (2000) warned teachers that the inclusion of intuitive processes is no excuse for undisciplined or laissez-faire practice and “Intuitively derived ideas have to be checked out or tested in a disciplined, rational manner” (p. 267). Gladwell (2005) also flagged that there may be circumstances when rapid cognition leads to poor decision making based on incorrect first impressions. However, “we are not helpless in the face of our first impressions ... [and] ... we can alter the way we thin slice - by changing the experiences that comprise those impressions. (Gladwell, 2005, pp. 96, 97)

Claxton (2000) suggested that intuition has the potential to be extremely useful but that the information it brings should be treated as a hypothesis, rather than ‘the truth.’ However, Claxton warned that viewing intuition as a guide rather than the truth may be difficult for some people because of the subjective feeling of rightness associated with intuition. His recommendation is simple, “A balanced view of intuition is one which sees it as a valuable source of hypotheses, which are nonetheless capable of being interrogated” (Claxton, 2000, p. 43). Like Gladwell, Claxton (2000) agrees that although intuition can be misleading, it can still be of value and people can be taught how to make it more reliable and perceptive.

Study purpose and rationale

The study described in this paper set out to explore the theories underpinning the practice of facilitator educators because there was a lack of clarity in the facilitation literature concerning the way that emerging facilitators actually developed their skills, knowledge, and experience. The study sought to establish the primary outcomes and essential components of facilitator education programs, as well as the theoretical foundations and values that informed the practice of facilitator educators. Finally, the study also asked the graduates of the facilitator educators’ programs which processes contributed the most to the development of their facilitation skills, knowledge, and experience.

My personal motivation for this conducting this study was to inform my own practice as an educator preparing facilitators for experiential education contexts. Given my belief in the dialectical relationship between

theory and practice I was concerned by the paucity of reflective, critical writing in the literature describing the best strategies to develop experiential education facilitators, or the theories underpinning those strategies. The values and assumptions underpinning my teaching and research interests revolve around a respect for, and belief in, people, which is congruent with values underpinning facilitation (International Association of Facilitators, 2004).

Methodology of study

The study utilised a naturalistic inquiry approach, within the interpretive paradigm because I was interested in finding out how facilitator educators made sense of the things they do by studying them in their natural settings (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). Naturalistic inquiry also allows for “multiple social constructions of meaning and knowledge” (Mertens, 1998, p. 11) and rather than pursuing a facade of objectivity, interpretivist researchers carefully examine their own values, biases, theoretical dispositions and monitor their thoughts and actions accordingly (Schwandt, 2001).

Methods of data collection

The primary sources of data in this study were interviews and participant observation with seven facilitator educators. These data sources were triangulated with qualitative surveys conducted with a sample of their program graduates. These methods were chosen because they provided the opportunity to collect data appropriate to the purpose of the study. The interviews and participant observations also allowed me to build good rapport with the facilitator educators, which helped me develop a better understanding of the rationales underpinning their theory and practice.

In the semi-structured interviews with the facilitator educators the pre-determined questions were allowed to emerge naturally over the course of the first interview. More interviews were conducted as required and in response to data collected in the participant observation phase of the study. The emerging issues in the programs being observed were used to determine the content and focus of these follow-up interviews. The primary foci of the participant observations of the facilitator educators’ programs were the strategies used by the facilitator educators to assist the facilitators to develop their skills, knowledge and competence. Secondary foci included: the sequencing of the program; key elements of the facilitator education process; references to theoretical foundations; and potential omissions or processes excluded from the facilitator education process.

In the study, a form of *reputational-case sampling* (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2000) was used and facilitator educators delivering programs in Australia in 2005 were invited to participate in the study based on their profile in the field, determined by their contribution to the literature (books and/or journals), their delivery of

reputable facilitation training courses, and/or their involvement in facilitation conferences, meetings, and internet-based discussion groups. For convenience, the sample was limited to seven facilitator educators of which four were based in Australia, two in New Zealand, and one in the USA. All of the facilitator educators agreed to be identified in this paper and they include: Glen Ochre and Ed McKinley from the ‘Groupwork Institute of Australia,’ Shirli Kirschner from ‘Resolve Advisors,’ Bob Dick from ‘Interchange,’ Dale Hunter and Hamish Brown from ‘Zenergy,’ and Roger Schwarz from ‘Roger Schwarz and Associates.’ A brief description of their organisations and facilitator education programs is provided in Figure 2.

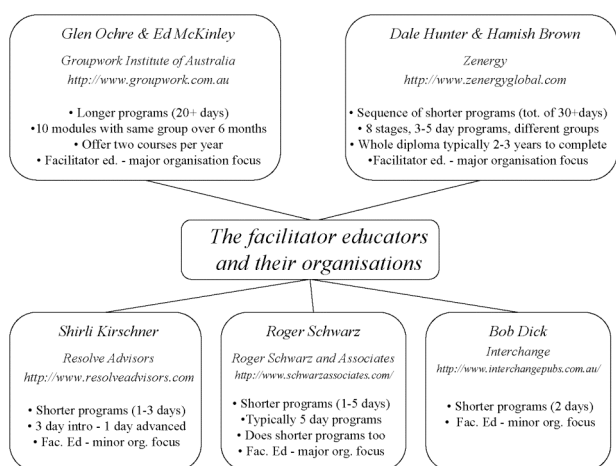


Figure 2. The facilitator educators in the study

To provide another perspective on the facilitator education process, and a source of triangulation, a sample of the graduates of the facilitator educators’ programs were invited to complete a survey. The survey involved three open-ended questions which sought to establish which processes within the training program the graduates found most helpful with their development as a facilitator, and what improvements they suggested. Table 1 indicates the approximate number of graduates, the sample size, and the response rate for each facilitator education organisation. A random sampling strategy was utilised for the survey component of the facilitation course except for organization B that elected to invite all of their graduates to participate in an online survey using their email list.

Table 1.
Graduate survey details

Facilitator Educators	Approximate number of graduates	Surveys distributed	Responses	Response Rate %
Glen & Ed	100*	32	12	37.5
Dale & Hamish	556*	556#	80	14.4
Bob	55^	25	5	25
Roger	80^	40	7	17.5
Total:			104	
Average:				23.6

* These total numbers included graduates of their courses over a number of years.
These graduates were contacted by email and invited to participate in the online survey
^ This number represents the graduates of a single course, or series of courses, provided in 2005

Data analysis

The data reduction of the transcribed interviews, interview notes, field notes, and survey responses occurred continuously from the start of data collection and included writing summaries and memos, coding, teasing out themes, making clusters (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The constant comparison method, conceptualised by Glaser and Strauss (1967), was used to identify themes, essences or patterns within research data. Models were used to display the data to help the process of conclusion drawing and verification.

Trustworthiness and dependability of the findings

Interpretivist researchers accept that the concept of objectivity is flawed and claims of research objectivity “pretend that our preconceptions and biases are not influencing our research when they actually are an unavoidable influence on research practices” (Ezzy, 2002, p. 53). Rather than focus on objectivity and reliability, researchers within the interpretivist paradigm seek to demonstrate dependability and authenticity. Lincoln and Guba’s (2003) *authenticity criteria* were adopted in this study as the hallmarks of authentic, trustworthy, rigorous, and valid interpretive inquiry. Their first criterion, *fairness*, ensured that all stakeholders’ views were sought and member checks were used with the facilitator educators to enhance the accuracy of transcribed interviews and field notes summaries. The second criterion of *ontological and educative authenticity* was enhanced by being open and explicit about the methods I used, and my reasons for using them. The final criterion of *catalytic and tactical authenticity* referred to the potential for my inquiry to prompt research participants into action and discussions. Fortunately, some of the facilitator educators have indicated that their participation in this study has led to some improvements in their courses.

Other strategies, in addition to member checking and triangulation, were used to enhance the trustworthiness of the findings, including *prolonged engagement*, *thick description* and *auditing* (Creswell, 1998). The issue of prolonged engagement was resolved by completing 35 days of participant observation and interviews with the facilitator educators over an 18-month period. The findings presented in the next section provide a thick description, which enables the reader to make judgements about the transferability of the findings. A research journal and memos were used to document the research process and the exact details of each quotation provided an audit trail that ensured that the conclusions developed are traceable and defensible.

Findings

Four primary themes emerged in the study: *important facilitator educator values and actions*; *key facilitation concepts*; *important elements of the facilitator education process*; and *the role of self-facilitation*. In this paper, I will only report on *the need for intentionality* and

the *place of intuition*, which were sub-themes within the key facilitation concepts theme.

Need for intentionality

All of the facilitator educators, in this study agreed there is a need for facilitators to be intentional, although there were differences in how they encouraged their emerging facilitators¹ to practice in this way. The facilitator educators were able to provide rationales for their actions, though their levels of discursive consciousness (Giddens, 1984) appeared to increase during the study. This was rewarding because it was the kind of mutually beneficial outcome that I hoped would occur for the facilitator educators as a consequence of their participation in the research.

Glen Ochre was committed to the principle of intentionality in facilitation although she preferred the term *being purposeful*, and she explained, “the interventions we choose need to be based on conscious purpose” (interview notes, 16/6/05). Ed McKinley maintained, “good facilitation is about choosing consciously ... [whereas]... the alternative is to react [unconsciously]” (interview notes, 16/6/05). Another one of Glen’s slogans was that the facilitator is at the service of the group, and “our values and principles need to guide our practice” (field notes, day #3, 19/4/05). She explained that facilitators need “to be conscious, to know why, even if it begins as intuition ... we need to translate it to a why ... with an understanding of the purpose and results” (interview notes, 16/6/05).

Shirli Kirschner taught in her program that the primary role of a facilitator is “to deliver key goals and outputs in a meaningful and purposeful way” (field notes, day #2, 1/9/05). She explained that facilitators not only need to be explicit about their role with the group, they also “need to have a good reason for doing the things [they] do” (field notes, day #1, 31/8/05). Bob Dick and Roger Schwarz shared a common theoretical foundation in the work of Argyris and Schön (1996) and consequently, their views on intentionality were similar. Bob explained to his emerging facilitators “my preference is to make my motives/action transparent, this allows the group to ‘step up’ quicker” (field notes, day #2, 29/11/05) and be less reliant on the facilitator. However, Bob acknowledged that there would always be “flaws in our intentionality, and gaps between our espoused theory and our theory-in-use” (field notes, day #2, 29/11/05).

Roger was one of the more outspoken facilitator educators on the issue of intentionality and he indicated that whether or not the facilitator is aware of them, or can articulate them to others, every facilitator works from a set of values and assumptions and it is impossible not to. Roger considers the relevant questions for emerging facilitators to be: 1) Do you know what your values and assumptions in use are? 2) Can you articulate them to clients so they can make a choice about whether they want to work with you? 3) Do you have a way of identifying and closing the gap between the values/assumptions you

espouse and the ones that you actually use? (Member check email, 20/11/05). I asked Roger how emerging facilitators developed the values that underpin his approach and he indicated that in his longer programs, “everything we do is related back to the core values/assumptions - the values are the foundation” (Member check email, 20/11/05). Another key to Roger’s Skilled Facilitator Approach is *transparency* and he indicated,

This means that the facilitator is able to share his/her reasoning for the interventions he/she makes. In order to be transparent with your clients, you need to have access to your reasoning process. As you get more skilled in the approach you more quickly access your reasoning underlying any intervention you make. (Member check email, 20/11/05)

Although all of the facilitator educators were able to provide some explicit theoretical rationales for their own practice, they were less able to articulate explicit strategies for helping emerging facilitators to develop their own intentionality. This finding is consistent with the literature on teacher education and Lazarus (2000) warned that “In order to support beginning teachers, mentors need to develop the ability to articulate beliefs, views, knowledge and know-how, which may be implicit or intuitive, in a way that suits both the mentor and the protégé” (p. 110). Although internal monologues may have served facilitator educators well in their own practice, “Many experienced professionals learning the new role of mentor, in education as elsewhere, have been struck by the gap between being able to ‘do it,’ and being able to articulate what you are doing” (Claxton, 2000, p. 35). The next section explores the place of intuition in the practice of the facilitator educators in this study.

The place of intuition

Although all of the facilitator educators in the study emphasised the need for intentionality they also indicated the importance of intuitive processes and the need for facilitator education to focus on them. For example, Roger expressed the following perspective on intuition.

I think of intuition as the ability to act effectively in situations without having conscious access to the reasoning process that generated the effective behaviour. I think intuition is valuable and at the same time limiting. I don’t know how to teach other facilitators (or my clients) what I know intuitively but cannot articulate. My goal is to close the gap - as much as possible - between what I know intuitively and what I can explain, recognizing that there will always be a gap. (Member check email, 20/11/05)

Glen acknowledged that sometimes it is possible to know something without understanding why, but she recommended emerging facilitators use a particular strategy with their participants, “If you have a hunch, explore that hunch, if it is denied, okay move on, usually it will re-occur” (field notes, day #3, 19/4/05). This is consistent with the views of Martin et al. (2006) who also suggested that it is risky to rely on single occurrences, but if a facilitator intuitively detects something going on in a group with more regularity, then it will be less risky to share a hypothesis. Glen encouraged the emerging facilitators to test intuitive hunches, and to collect more data. For Glen, the key to the successful use of intuition in facilitation is to be,

... very tuned in and awake. The awakesness is the key to managing the process. There are no easy rules or recipes. It takes lots of judgment, and practice is very important. (Interview notes, 16/6/05)

Shirli suggested to her emerging facilitators that it can be hard to “trust your gut” (field notes, day #1, 31/8/05) when it flies in the face of the other information, but “your gut is a good indicator, tune into it and trust it” (field notes, day #1, 31/8/05). Dale Hunter and Hamish Brown presented intuition as one of the *essences* or *distinctions* of facilitation, in the second stage of their Diploma of Facilitation program. Dale explained that being connected with, and using their intuition, is essential for facilitators because they often have to act in the moment with little or no time to think (Hunter, Bailey, & Taylor, 1995). Intuition involves a whole lot of capacities, which Dale argued Western society is poorly equipped to understand. In her programs she presented a model that identifies twelve aspects of whole-person facilitation including *intuitive* and *energetic* (see Hunter, Bailey, & Taylor, 1998). When educating facilitators Dale has found that people from Maori, Polynesian and Asian cultures seem to accept the many dimensions within the model more readily than some Westerners.

There were some variations in the way facilitator educators emphasised the use of intuition when facilitating groups. Dale, Hamish and Glen were more prepared to recognise non-rational elements outside the facilitators’ conscious awareness consistent with Gladwell’s (2005) description of rapid decision making, or thin-slicing. Roger seemed as though he would be less comfortable with Gladwell’s assertion that “we need to accept the mysterious nature of our snap judgments” (p. 52) and Roger expressed concern about an over-reliance on snap judgments, particularly because it means the facilitator is less able to be transparent with his or her client. However, Glen, Dale and Hamish considered intuition as another source of potentially valuable data that needs to be tested like all other data. This is actually similar to the process of *testing inferences* that Roger advocated within his Skilled Facilitator Approach (Schwarz, 2002). If the facilitator is able to tentatively present his/her hunch or best guess of what might be going on in a group then it does not matter

if the evidence guiding our decisions is buried somewhere in our unconscious (Gladwell, 2005). This is especially true if the group is encouraged to refute the facilitator’s perception and provide an alternate view.

Conclusions and recommendations

The facilitator educators in the study emphasised the importance of both intentionality and intuition. However, the facilitator educators in the study recognised that it may be unrealistic to expect facilitators to demonstrate intentionality in all situations, or at all times. They also recognised that intuition has an important role to play in a facilitator’s practice, because there will be times when discursive consciousness (Giddens, 1984) is neither practical, attainable, or even desirable. At times, group facilitation requires complex decisions to be made quickly and “without knowing why we know” (Gladwell, 2005, p. 52) a particular intervention is appropriate.

The facilitator educators concurred with the literature that one of the primary uses for intuition when facilitating is hypothesis formation. They encouraged emerging facilitators to treat information gleaned through intuitive processes tentatively, and to test assumptions with the group. There was also no suggestion from the facilitator educators that facilitators should rely entirely on intuitive processes, or what Giddens’ (1984) described as practical consciousness. A number of the facilitator educators also encouraged emerging facilitators to develop an awareness and appreciation of how unconscious processes in groups are important to effective facilitation. This finding supports similar recommendations made by Ringer (2002) for group leaders and Neville (2005) for emerging teachers.

The facilitator educators in the study concurred with many of the recommendations made in the literature about the need for intentionality, but the facilitator educators were less able to describe the means by which emerging facilitators can develop their own intentionality. Roger, the exception to this trend, recommended facilitators adopt the values and theoretical underpinning that he presented as a complete package in his Skilled Facilitator Approach. However, the efficacy of adopting values and theoretical foundations is contentious and in challenging facilitation situations, the gap between an emerging facilitator’s adopted theory and values, and his or her theory-in-use, is likely to be exposed. Despite this potential issue there is a need to establish effective ways of helping emerging facilitators clarify or establish the values and theories underpinning their practice.

Most of the facilitator educators in the study did not demonstrate strategies specifically targeting the development of intuition. However, the learning climate they created and the general strategies used for the development of skills, knowledge and experience as facilitators were aligned with the literature’s more specific suggestions on how to develop intuitive processes. The first task for facilitators would be to recognise that

learning to be intuitive requires creating the right environment for such learning to occur. Claxton (2000) recommends an environment that is “convivial, playful, cooperative and non-judgmental, as well as being purposeful and professional” (Claxton, 2000, p. 48). The use of intuition requires speculation, which involves vulnerability, so the kind of environment described by Claxton is important for people to feel comfortable about making mistakes and possibly getting it wrong. In their own way, each of the facilitator educators in the study worked hard to create such learning environments.

In particular, person-centered facilitator education approaches (Thomas, in press) can make an important contribution to helping emerging facilitators to be real, authentic, and free to experiment and make mistakes. Glen in particular emphasised the need to develop self-awareness and awareness of implicit processes occurring in groups, and she tried to encourage the emerging facilitators to be brave enough to ask questions about the ‘dead rat’ in the room, which was her way of using humour to draw attention to “something that had gone on in the group that was not named” (Glen, Field notes, 21/5/05). Glen even had a toy rat in her bag of tricks ready to toss into the circle to dissipate some of the tension emerging facilitators may feel as they test out an intuitive hypothesis with the group.

Atkinson (2000) suggested there are three components, which influence the efficacy of learning about intuition: support, direction, and structure. Applying these principles to facilitator education, the development of intuition requires: an appropriate level of support from peers and facilitator educators for experimentation to occur; an appropriate amount of direction (or freedom) to allow the facilitator to experiment; and the appropriate structures to provide a consistent framework to reflect on results.

Working on developing intuition requires both a tolerance for ambiguity and patience in order to “to resist the desire to end the discomfort of confusion by inducing the birth of understanding” (Claxton, 2000, p. 49). The emphasis on intuition will be difficult for some emerging facilitators because of the way that intuition has been

ignored, marginalised, romanticised or denigrated in mainstream educational cultures, partly because of its historical association with claims for its validity that seem grandiose or mystical, and partly because we have, until recently, lacked a cognitive psychology which makes scientific sense of its nature and its value. (Claxton, 2000, p. 49)

In closing, intentional and intuitive processes could be perceived as an incompatible dichotomy, but I believe it is more accurate to present them a paradox. As explained by Palmer (1998), “In certain circumstances, truth is a paradoxical joining of apparent opposites, and if

we want to know that truth, we must learn to embrace those opposites as one” (p. 63). Paradox is another way of describing the tension that occurs when two seemingly opposite perspectives are held together to create a magical spark (Palmer, 1998). When discussing the tension between these processes for teachers, Claxton (2000) was adamant that “Simplistic polarization is neither psychologically accurate nor professionally productive. Instead, we may more fruitfully ask ... what is the functional relationship between the explicit and the implicit?” (p. 34).

The findings of this study and the conclusions in the literature make it clear that both intentionality and intuition are relevant and important to facilitators within experiential education, adventure education and outdoor learning settings. Learning to embrace the tension, and enjoy the paradox, will be a challenge for some emerging facilitators. Intentionality and intuition can be enhanced if emerging facilitators are prepared to develop their experience through reflective practice, observe experienced facilitators in action, and find suitable mentors who can help them. I concur with Gladwell’s (2005) assertion that emerging facilitators can educate themselves about how they use intuition, which equates to using intuition with more awareness and intentionality.

Footnote

1. The term *emerging facilitators* is used to describe the participants of the facilitator education programs described in this study.

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