Dimensions of Facilitator Education.

By
Glyn Thomas
La Trobe University, Bendigo, Victoria

Abstract

The literature on facilitation describes the skills, methods, models and theories of facilitation but gives less coverage to the assumptions and philosophies that underpin the processes by which facilitators develop. This chapter reviews the literature on facilitation in an organisational development context and provides a model, which helps to organize and differentiate approaches to facilitator education. In The Dimensions of Facilitator Education Model, technical facilitator education approaches are skills-based and formulaic whereas intentional facilitator education approaches purposively ground facilitation skills and methods in theory. Person centered facilitator education approaches intentionally emphasize the attitudes, personal qualities or presence of the facilitator whereas critical facilitator education approaches seek to raise the awareness of the political nature of facilitation. The model provides an interpretive framework to stimulate reflection, discussion and further research into the theory and practice of facilitator education within the organisational development field.

The literature on facilitation is primarily focused on describing facilitation skills and models for practice, and to a lesser extent, the theories of facilitation practice. There is however, considerably less focus on the assumptions and or philosophies that underpin facilitation practice. Similarly, there is little discussion about the processes that may help facilitators to develop their skills, competence, judgment and theoretical grounding. Historically, most of the literature on facilitation has not has not been grounded in empirical research although recently there has been growth in the research based facilitation literature within the organisational development (OD) field (see Ellinger & Bostrom, 2002; Mongeau & Morr, 1999; Niederman & Volkema, 1999).

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a model that differentiates the numerous approaches to facilitator education found in the facilitation literature within an OD context. Hopefully, the model presented will provide a useful interpretive framework to stimulate reflection, discussion and further research into the theory and practice of facilitator education. The aim here is not to provide an extensive review of the facilitation skills, strategies, models and theories described in the literature but rather the focus will be on the assumptions and or philosophies underpinning facilitator education as stated or implied in the facilitation literature. First though, let’s consider the growing emphasis of facilitation within the OD field.

The Demand for Facilitator Education in Organisation Development

The growing need for more facilitative styles of management seems to be commonly accepted in the OD literature even though there is little empirical evidence to support this view. Global economic change continues to put increased pressure on organisations via increased competition for customers, the rapid development of technology, reductions in production costs, and the proliferation of customers who are increasingly sophisticated
about choices and pricing (Marsick & Watkins, 1999; Weaver & Farrell, 1997). Hogan (2002) contends that to meet these challenges there has been a increase in participatory approaches to management which has boosted the profile of facilitation. Pierce, Cheesebrow, & Braun (2000) also state that “facilitation is increasingly being used as a participatory tool for getting results in group dialogue, analysis, decision making, and planning” (p. 31).

There has been a corresponding shift away from traditional conceptions of management, of command and control, to a new focus on employee involvement, self managed work teams, and Total Quality Management approaches (Stahl, 1995). The traditional management functions of planning, organizing, leading and controlling are now shared with non-supervisory employees at different organisational levels because there is too much to do, and not enough time to do it. The effect on managers has been significant, “the pace of work is faster and more furious … managers have to deal with a staggering amount of information … they have far more responsibilities and fewer resources to get the job done …technology is rapidly changing the way people work together … it is common for work groups to be geographically dispersed. Meetings frequently take place over the phone, and sales transactions are made via e-mail” (Weaver & Farrell, 1997, p. 2).

Responsive organisations require managers who are genuinely committed to deep change in themselves and in their organisations. These managers lead by developing new skills, capabilities and understandings and they come from many places within the organisations (Senge, 1996, p. 45). Larsen, McInerney, Nyquist, Silsbee, & Zagonal (2002, p. 31) state that “group facilitation is often the necessary process that allows organisations to learn and to learn how to change” and managers within organisations are increasingly being expected to act as *de facto* facilitators (Webne-Behrman, 1998). Despite the lack of empirical research examining the roles and behaviors of leaders and managers and their effect on learning in their organizations, in many organisations today managers are exhorted to become teachers, educators, developers, leaders of learning, strategic learning managers, and coaches (Ellinger & Bostrom, 2002).

In one of the rare empirical studies on facilitation in an OD context, Ellinger and Bostrom (2002) explored the mental models of exemplary managers as they were serving as facilitators of learning. They found that organisations with new empowerment paradigms needed to focus management development initiatives on more than just behavior (coaching skills) but they must also focus on the beliefs managers hold. Many managers in progressive organisations have had to shift away from a traditional control model to a learning facilitator model. A supportive organisational culture was mentioned by managers in the study as very important in sustaining and supporting the transition to the facilitator of learning role - a process which takes time and presents many challenges (Ellinger & Bostrom, 2002).

Larsen et al. (2002) also espouse the importance of the participation of skilled facilitators in the development of the core disciplines of learning organisations as identified by Senge (1990) which include: personal mastery, mental models, team learning, shared vision, and systems thinking. In their summary of the literature (Larsen et al., 2002) describe the key characteristics of a learning organisation as, “a belief in the ability of people and organisations to change and become more effective, and that change requires open communication and empowerment of community members as well as a culture of collaboration” (p. 31). In response to this growing demand for facilitation the Facilitator Competency Model was developed by the International Association of Facilitators (IAF) and the Institute of Cultural Affairs (ICA) (Pierce et al., 2000) to: define the profession, guide facilitators professional development, provide a framework for those who serve as mentors to other facilitators, provide a system of certification, and be a
resource to those developing academic programs specific to facilitation.

To balance this rosy view of facilitation in OD, Hughes (1999) warns that although the workplace is usually seen as a rich and exciting learning environment, it can also be an extremely hostile one and it “can be argued that the role of employers and their supervisors as facilitators of learning is also fundamentally problematic because of the hierarchy and conflict of interest that is inherent in the relationships involved (Hughes, 1999, p. 34).

In summary, although some aspects of facilitation within OD may be problematic yet there is no shortage of literature espousing the value of facilitation in this context, as we will see in the next section. However, the facilitation literature is not in full agreement on how managers or consultants may be best educated to fulfill these facilitation roles in OD. Some of the differences in approaches to facilitator education approaches evident in the literature will now be addressed.

**Different Approaches to Facilitator Education**

A range of definitions and conceptualizations of the facilitation process exist within the literature, which typically describe how facilitation should occur which influences how facilitator education should proceed. This chapter deliberately uses the term facilitator education rather than facilitator training or facilitator development because, as suggested by Hogan (2002), the term ‘education’ implies a deeper level of engagement than ‘training’ or ‘development’ implies.

Many of the approaches to facilitator education in the literature seem to fit into one of the following broad frameworks:

- **Technical facilitator education**
  - approaches which are skills-based, and formulaic in style (see Bendaly, 2000; Hart, 1991, 1992; Havergal & Edmonstone, 1999; Parry, 1995; Sharp, 1992);

- **Intentional facilitator education**
  - approaches where practice is grounded in theory and justifications for particular interventions are provided (see Bentley, 1994; Brockbank & McGill, 1998; Heron, 1989, 1993, 1999; Priest, Gass, & Gillis, 2000; Schwarz, 2002; Weaver & Farrell, 1997);

- **Person centered facilitator education**
  - approaches which specifically emphasize the attitudes, personal qualities and presence of the facilitator (see Hunter, Bailey, & Taylor, 1999; Ringer, 2002; Rogers, 1983, 1989);

- **Critical facilitator education**
  - approaches that emphasizes an increased awareness of the political nature of facilitation and the effects on all participants (see Kirk & Broussine, 2000).

These categories are forthwith called dimensions and figure 1 illustrates their relationship to each other in the Dimensions of Facilitator Education Model shown in figure 1. Previously, Thomas (in press) used a typology to describe the differences between approaches to facilitation education in an experiential education context.

However, following a workshop at an Australasian Facilitator’s Network conference in November 2003 where the aforementioned typology was discussed, feedback from participants suggested that nested boxes more effectively communicate the relationship between the different approaches to facilitator education than a typology. Before describing these dimensions it is important to clarify two issues. Firstly, each larger box implies an extension on the box, which nests inside it. In this respect the model implies there is a progression in the depth and complexity of the facilitator education process because the literature describes it that way. Secondly, whilst many of the approaches to facilitator education did tend to fit within a single dimension this was not true of all the literature.
Some approaches to facilitator education (see Hogan, 2002, 2003; Hunter, Bailey, & Taylor, 1995; Hunter et al., 1999; Pierce et al., 2000) discuss the importance of processes in more than one of the dimensions presented in the model. Descriptions of each of the dimensions will now be provided.

**The Technical Facilitator Education Dimension.** Approaches to facilitation that may be classified as technical, focus on the skills and competencies required to facilitate groups. Implicit within these approaches is the assumption that by mastering a certain set of skills and methods an individual can learn to effectively facilitate a group’s process. However, there is a range of approaches to facilitation even within this category. In the “The Facilitation Skills Training Kit” Bendaly (2000) presents twenty skills-focused modules that can be used to help people to develop facilitation skills. The delivery of each module is highly structured, inflexible, and outcomes focused. A similar facilitation training resource developed by Hart (1991; 1992), called the “Faultless Facilitation Method”, provides an
equally prescriptive training program focused on developing particular facilitation skills. Hart provides detailed lesson plans, examples of course overviews, resources, and evaluation forms. The “Facilitator’s Toolkit” by Havergal and Edmonstone (1999) takes a similar approach to facilitator education. All of the above authors are deliberately prescriptive about the skills they believe are needed to facilitate effectively.

In an article focusing on the ‘never-evers’ of workshop facilitation, Sharp (1992) provides a list of twenty practical tips for potential facilitators and all but one of the suggestions relate to specific actions. Only one of the ‘never-evers’ deals with the beliefs or attitudes of the facilitator. Parry (1995) maintains that facilitators, in addition to possessing certain attributes, need a combination of technical skills, behavioral and interpersonal skills, and consultancy skills. Not all the literature within this classification is as formulaic in the way they conceptualize facilitation as the previous examples. Although still emphasizing the need to develop skills, Hackett and Martin (1993) also consider ideas and concepts. Justice and Jamieson (1999) predominantly emphasize the need for skills but they do also provide some brief discussion on the need to “draw on some knowledge bases useful to facilitation” and to “employ personal characteristics that are helpful to the facilitator role” (p. 5).

In summary, the majority of literature reviewed that fits into this technical facilitator education category focuses on the skills that facilitators need, using what may be described as a competency based training approach. [At this point it is important to distinguish the difference between a competency based training approach and the Facilitator Competency Model developed by the IAF and ICA (Pierce et al., 2000). The Facilitator Competency Model uses the term competency in a much broader sense and some of the “competencies” presented in that model could perhaps be more accurately described as the values, goals or commitments of a professional facilitator (Hogan, 2002; Schwarz, 2000)]. Competency based training tends to downplay the affective and cognitive dimensions of learning which means that it may fail to address values and professionalism, conceptual knowledge, underpinning experience, and tacit knowledge (James, 2001). Some sections of the literature within this dimension provide little or no discussion about the theories upon which skills or actions are based, or about the values, attitudes and beliefs that are conducive to effective facilitation. Hogan (2002, p. 207) describes these kind of approaches as having a “‘box of tricks’ mindset” and she tries to help emerging facilitators to become “aware of the complexities of human behavior and the responsibilities of their facilitation roles”. Some of the literature within this dimension provide an impression that facilitation is easy if you follow the recipes provided, which would be fine if the “ingredients” were all the same! Whilst this kind of thinking may facilitate book sales approaches to facilitator education that do not move beyond this first dimension belie the true complexity and difficulty of facilitation in many OD contexts. Many of the approaches to facilitator education in the next dimension of the model explain the importance of helping emerging facilitators to move beyond this dimension of technical facilitator education.

The Intentional Facilitator Education Dimension. Approaches within this category recognize the important of teaching prospective facilitators suitable methods, skills and strategies but in this dimension facilitators are encouraged be intentional, “in the sense that the facilitator is conscious of what she (sic) is doing and why” (Brockbank & McGill, 1998, p. 152). This type of explicit intentionality is demonstrated: in the dialogue used, through an awareness of the process, by making otherwise hidden processes explicit, by encouraging an awareness of personal stances, and by modeling desired behaviors (Brockbank & McGill, 1998).

Weaver & Farrell (1997, p. xiv) are critical of authors who “assume that facilitation is simply having a sufficiently large stock of tools that can be selected when a group becomes bogged down” and they maintain that “effective
facilitation reflects a practical set of skills and knowledge that helps people work together better to complete real work”. Bentley (1994) states that traditional definitions of facilitation describe an activity - things that people do. However, he argues that it also includes “non-action, silence and even the facilitator’s absence” (Bentley, 1994, p. 10). Thus, the intentional facilitator must not only carefully consider how they act and respond but also how and when to “not respond”.

In one of the rare articles based on empirical research, Ellinger and Bostrom (2002) explored the way that managers frame their roles and the beliefs that they have about learners and the learning process. The research used a descriptive qualitative methodology which included semi-structured interviews with twelve managers and an adaptation of the Critical Incident Technique (Flanagan, 1954; Ellinger and Watkins, 1998; cited in Ellinger & Bostrom, 2002). This technique involved systematic and sequential procedures to record detailed observations of critical incidents in the past. The data were then analyzed using content analysis to establish emerging themes and develop broad psychological principles (Ellinger & Bostrom, 2002). A purposive sampling strategy was used and the managers who participated came recommended by their employers as exemplary facilitators of learning. Weaknesses in the research design, including problems with the assessment process used to ascertain the participants’ status as “exemplary” facilitators and the heavy reliance on memories of critical incidents, do not detract from the findings of this piece of exploratory research.

In the study it was found that managers perceive their roles as ‘manager’ and ‘facilitator of learning’ distinctly. The findings indicated that managers will only successfully shift from a traditional managerial controlling role to a facilitator of learning role if their corresponding beliefs are also changed. Ellinger and Bostrom (2002, p. 173) found that, “while most management development programs often focus on skill or behavior development, few if any focus on the belief aspects associated with acquired new behaviors”. One of the research recommendations for improved facilitation education for managers is that “skill training and interventions that focus on behavioral change must pay attention to beliefs” (Ellinger & Bostrom, 2002, p. 173). The study also highlighted the need for a supportive organisational culture in sustaining and supporting the transition to the facilitator of learning role, a process that takes time and presents many challenges.

In one of the more comprehensive texts on facilitation, Schwarz (2002) outlines “The Skilled Facilitator Approach” which is based on a set of core values, assumptions, and principles. His systems approach integrates theory and practice and focuses on the internal and external work of facilitation. The first premise on which Schwarz builds his whole approach to facilitation involves making core values explicit. He explains that, “rendering them explicit enables you to understand and evaluate them directly rather than having to infer them from the techniques I describe” (Schwarz, 2002, p. 9). The other premise of Schwarz’s approach is understanding and establishing ground rules for effective groups, because they function as a diagnostic tool and a teaching tool for developing effective group norms. Schwarz’s (2002) approach is intentional because he explains that “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 “ (p. 9).

In a critique of technical approaches to facilitation, Schwarz states it is “not simply a matter of learning new strategies, tools, or techniques. Your ineffectiveness results from the core values and assumptions you hold” (Schwarz, 2002, p. 66). Schwarz warns aspiring facilitators of uncritically borrowing methods and techniques from a variety of other
approaches because basing methods and techniques on conflicting values and principles can also lead to ineffectiveness. He explains that simply “changing what you say and how you say it is not sufficient to significantly change the unintended consequences you get” (2002, p. 93). In conditions of low favorability the facilitator’s theory-in-use (see Argyris & Schön, 1996) will override any new behavior that lacks a corresponding change in thinking patterns, which supports his stance that facilitation approaches that only teach techniques to improve facilitation will not work in difficult situations.

Heron has published numerous books on the topic of group facilitation over the last few decades (for example see 1989; 1993) but his latest book, “The Complete Facilitator” (1999), presents the culmination of his published work on the topic of facilitation to date. Heron (1999) creates a matrix of eighteen options for facilitation. The matrix is a combination of six dimensions of facilitation (planning, meaning, confronting, feeling, structuring and valuing) and three modes of facilitation (hierarchical, co-operative, autonomous). Heron suggests the matrix can be used: to make facilitators aware of the range and subtlety of options; as a self and peer assessment tool to work on strengths and weaknesses; and to devise training exercises to develop skill within particular modes and dimensions. Heron is not prescriptive or formulaic with these eighteen different combinations of modes and dimensions of facilitation but from a pragmatic perspective, the matrix is rather complicated. Priest et al. (2000) encourage facilitators to clarify their own personal belief systems and to develop knowledge of organisational development theories. With a very pragmatic feel they present a smorgasbord of facilitation ideas, methods and models to help facilitators increase their effectiveness but unlike Heron (1999) and Schwarz (2002) there is not a central model or theory to hold things together.

Van Maurik (1994, p. 34) developed a model that summarizes the range of facilitation styles with varying degrees of knowledge input and process input. The model is similar to the Situational Leadership Model developed by Hersey and Blanchard (1993) in that the four styles described utilize different combinations of emphasis on task behavior and relational behavior. Van Maurik maintains that the challenge is for facilitators to become more consciously aware, and intentional, about the style they use. He explains, “the benefits of having models of facilitative behavior to think about are that the facilitator can enact a more deliberate strategy and then look to see how effective it was” (van Maurik, 1994, p. 34).

One unresolved issue within this dimension of facilitator education concerns the level of awareness associated with intentionality. The work of Schön (1988; 1995), on how professionals practice, indicates that it is possible that a professional could effectively function without being able to articulate clear rationales for their actions. According to Schön, “there is nothing strange about the idea that a kind of knowing is inherent in intelligent action” and “our bias towards thinking blinds us to the non-logical processes which are omnipresent in effective practice” (1995, p. 52). Proponents of this perspective would argue that facilitators that draw on intuitive processes practice a different kind of intentionality, yet there is little discussion of this kind of practice within the facilitation literature. Hunter et al. (1999, p. 76) explain that “being connected with and using your intuition is essential as a facilitator” and that “often you will need to act in the moment, with little time to think”. They also maintain “facilitation is not a bundle of recipes. It is much more subtle and complex than that” (Hunter et al., 1999, p. 76).

In summary, intentional facilitator education approaches enhance the technical facilitator education dimension by deliberately integrating learning about skills, techniques and methods with learning about theories, values and beliefs. The next dimension expands further the facilitator education process.
The Person Centered Facilitator Education Dimension. The person centered approach is also intentional in nature but rather than emphasizing skills, techniques, methods, and the underpinning theories, facilitator education in this dimension focuses on the qualities of the interpersonal relationships between the facilitator and group. Rogers (1983; 1989) provides a good example of such an approach because he stated that the personal qualities and attitudes of the facilitator are more important than any methods they employ. Rogers explained methods and strategies will be ineffective unless the facilitator demonstrates a genuine desire to “create a climate in which there is freedom to learn” (Rogers, 1983, p. 157). Rogers (1983; 1989) described the essential personal qualities of a facilitator as: being real; demonstrating prizing, acceptance, and trust; and practicing empathic understanding.

Also within this dimension, Ringer (2002) advocates a 'subjectivist' view of group leadership and facilitation that frees the facilitator from “the illusion that leaders are in control of the group. We can see our interactions with the group in a new light: as influence rather than control" (Ringer, 2002, p. 62). In this respect, the facilitator is still intentional in their approach to facilitation but their role in a group is aided less by technique and more through the facilitator’s presence which is developed by enhancing a conscious awareness of his or her own subjectivity. Thus, it is the facilitator’s presence that also becomes the focus of their intentionality not just his or her actions or responses to the group. Ringer’s approach, based in psychodynamics, takes the emphasis solely off learning skills and methods, and raises the profile of “maintaining your self fully present with the group and providing appropriate support for the group to achieve its goal” (2002, p. 18). Ringer deliberately avoids providing "algorithmic step-by-step recipes that are intended to substitute for the judgment and experience of the group leader" (Ringer, 2002, p. 38). Ringer (1999) also espouses the need for facilitators to demonstrate suitable levels of psychological and emotional maturity to be make sure that group functioning is bounded, purposeful and safe. He describes the core aspects of this psychological maturity as: the ability to reflect on and take responsibility for one’s own assumptions; appropriate levels of involvement with the group; congruence between feelings, actions and reality; and the ability to tolerate complexity, ambiguity, and contradiction.

Although the model of facilitation competencies identified by the IAF and the ICA (Pierce et al., 2000, p. 33) focus on technical skills and knowledge they do also recognize that “in the art and science of guiding a group process, facilitators develop an awareness that they themselves are an important instrument in getting the work done” and that facilitators must also develop personal qualities in order to help groups achieve their purposes. Similarly, Hunter explains the secret to being an effective facilitator is “more to do with who you are and who you are being for the group you’re working with …. The relationship you develop with the group is the key” (in Hunter et al., 1995, p. 201). Similarly, Hogan (2002) enumerates the importance of relationships and the need for facilitators to be fully present and authentic with group members in her approach to facilitator education.

In summary, the person centered facilitator education dimension builds upon the previous two dimensions in the model by encouraging facilitator educators to also emphasize the importance of relationships with participants and the presence that the facilitator maintains in the group. In the fourth and final dimension to be discussed in the next section, facilitator education approaches are “specifically concerned with the influences of educational knowledge, and of cultural formations generally, that perpetuate or legitimate an unjust status quo” (Burbules & Berk, 1999, p. 46).

The Critical Facilitator Education Dimension. The dominant theme of facilitator educator within this dimension is that facilitators must recognize the political and
emotional impact organisations have on them. Kirk and Broussine (2000) refute the notion of facilitation as a set of skills and processes which are value free, objective and neutral. However, facilitators are often conceived as people apart, distanced from an organization’s political networks, and able to comment and intervene independently and neutrally. Kirk and Broussine (2000) argue that protestations of facilitator neutrality show either naiveté or cleverness because there will always be tensions between those who wish to preserve the system and those who wish to change it. Other authors (Broussine et al., 1998; Cervero & Wilson, 2001) have also identified the difficulty for facilitators in organizations to admit to the emotional and political aspects of their roles.

Hughes (1999) claims that there is a fundamental barrier to supervisors becoming effective facilitators and those who espouse the value of facilitation in organizations often assume that there is no conflict of interest between the facilitator and the learner, or they ignore the issue altogether. These conflicts of interest impact on the facilitator’s ability to develop a trusting relationship and his or her ability to foster critical reflectivity that probes for assumptions, values and beliefs underlying actions. In the related fields of community development and experiential education several authors espouse the need for a socially critical approach to facilitation. Warren (1998) suggests that socially critical facilitation requires us to “become more conscious of how methods can advance or impede social justice” (p. 21). She is also critical of facilitation lacking in theoretical validation and describes it as “empty attempts to practice without a sound grounding” and that it is particularly irresponsible if facilitators “attempt to 'do the right thing' without an understanding of their own biases or the current anti-bias work theory” (Warren, 1998, p. 23).

White (1999) adopts a socially critical perspective by suggesting that “good facilitators are ... committed to empowering those who are weaker, more vulnerable, marginalized, oppressed or otherwise disadvantaged” (p. 9). White explains that socially critical facilitation entails unlearning, which starts with “recognizing and countering disabilities of orientation” which are often imprinted or inflicted on facilitators in the name of education and training (1999, p. 9). Similarly, Warren (1998) is critical of facilitation training that focuses only on techniques and she suggests that developing facilitators must also focus on the “social and cultural backgrounds of their participants and the way their locations in privilege or marginality affect how they teach and facilitate” (p. 23). Although most facilitation would aim to be emancipatory, “facilitation can become part of a system of oppression and perpetuation of dependant relations, with facilitators becoming unwitting agents of manipulation and managerialism” (Kirk & Broussine, 2000, p. 14).

Kirk and Broussine (2000) identify four positions of facilitator awareness: partial awareness—closed, immobilized awareness, manipulative awareness, partial awareness—open. They recommend practicing from the position of partial awareness—open where the facilitator is “aware of his or her own limited awareness, actively and openly works with what they think is going on in themselves, in the group and wider system ... realizing their own partiality” (Kirk & Broussine, 2000, p. 20). To help facilitators to practice with authority and confidence, Kirk and Broussine (2000) provide some practical suggestions in the context of an increased political awareness. They suggest, facilitators should acknowledge their partial awareness, engage in reflective practice, give attention to their own development, practice reflexivity, acknowledge the complexity of facilitation role, and exercise care about the process and for the people in the process. The critical thinking integral to this dimension works on the premise that "where our beliefs remain unexamined, we are not free; we act without thinking about why we act, and thus do not exercise control over our own destinies" (Burbules & Berk, 1999, p. 46).
In summary, critical facilitator education approaches go beyond critical thinking to specifically target beliefs, theories, and practices which are repressive, partisan, or implicated in the preservation of an unjust status quo (Burbules & Berk, 1999). It is possible, that in so doing, critical facilitator education approaches go dangerously close to prejudging what might be suitable facilitator interventions, rather than allowing facilitators to respond to the group and it’s needs ‘in the moment’. However, critical facilitator educators would contend that failure to focus on social injustices under the pretense of impartiality, would simply enshrine many conventional assumptions in a manner that intentionally, or unintentionally, maintains political conformity (Burbules & Berk, 1999).

Limitations of the Model and Issues for Facilitator Education

George Box (source unknown) is the reported author of the quote, “All models are wrong, some are even useful”. In the context of the above quote The Dimensions of Facilitator Education Model, like every other model ever developed, fails to perfectly conceptualize the literature on facilitator education. Some of the limitations and potential issues with the model will now be addressed.

As mentioned earlier, although many examples of the literature seem to focus primarily on one dimension of the model, some approaches to facilitator education transcend several dimensions of the model. The approaches taken by Hogan (2002; 2003), Hunter et al. (1995; 1999) and the IAF and ICA (Pierce et al., 2000) are good examples. This is potentially confusing but reflects the fact that some of the literature on facilitation has a broad facilitator education focus and it addressed a range of facilitation competencies, knowledge, values and beliefs. For other authors one dimension is enough to classify the approach to facilitator education they present. The model is also be more user friendly if the boundaries between each dimension are viewed as overlapping or at least blurred.

By definition the model implies that each new dimension incorporates the elements of previous dimension and then adds an additional layer of complexity of facilitator education. The progression is in some respects sequential but in reality facilitator education has multiple entry points. For example, a person with knowledge, interest, and or experience in critical education (see Freire, 1973) or community development in developing countries (see Phnuyl, Archer, & Cottingham, 1997) may gravitate straight towards a critical facilitator education approach. However, they may also have to ‘double back’ and experience the facilitator education approaches of previous dimensions to master certain competencies, gain specific knowledge, or develop certain attributes or qualities. Similarly, before an emerging facilitator can truly focus on the approach of a more complex dimension of facilitator education it could be argued that he or she must first achieve mastery in a preceding dimension/s of the model. Literature on the nature of expertise (Chi, Farr, & Glaser, 1988) suggests that experts are often able to function with greater speed and effectiveness because they have mastered, to a level of automaticity (Flor & Dooley, 1998), skills or processes required to perform particular tasks. It is possible that the same is true for facilitators and that they must master previous dimensions to be ‘fully present’ and facilitate using the approaches recommended in other dimensions of facilitator education. Further discussion and research is required to address the above issues.

Secondly, when the literature on facilitation did not specifically identify processes, rationales, or values concerning facilitator education, judgments about authors’ perspectives on facilitator education were made. It is possible that the critical reading of the literature presented in this paper is flawed or that others may interpret implied meanings differently. It is hoped that further discussion and research will lead to a better understanding of facilitator education rationales. It would also be productive if more authors were explicit about the strategies and techniques that
emerging facilitators could use to continue their development.

Another issue that warrants further research is the apparent tension regarding interpretations of intentionality. As discussed earlier, some authors advocate an explicit intentionality and yet there may be a case for a tacit level of intentionality. It is hoped that further research and discussion will contribute to an increased understanding of the relationship between theory and practice of facilitation in experiential education. Hovenlynck (1998) describes the facilitator education process as a generative process where developing facilitators learn to articulate what makes-sense-in-practice, or their knowing-in-action. In this respect, while it would be unhelpful to use Schön’s (1988; 1995) work as an excuse for not questioning one's theory and attempting to express it when appropriate, Schön balances the view that facilitators could ever hope to reach a state of complete intentionality. Approaches such as action learning (Weinstein, 1999) may help lead to an alternative theory-practice relationship which would be beneficial in facilitator education. The action learning framework, builds upon programmed knowledge (pre-existing expert knowledge, theories, and personal knowledge), by questioning it, acting on it, and reflecting on it.

Fourth, and finally, there are some apparent weakness in the facilitation literature at present. Only a small proportion is grounded in empirical research and whilst the profession may not be well suited to positivistic studies, research using naturalistic or interpretive methodologies would strengthen and deepen our understanding of facilitation practice and theory. Methodologies based on critical theory (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2000) would also be well suited to exploring the dimension of critical facilitator education. Finally, whilst there is ample discussion of the skills, theories and practice of facilitation there is less discussion in the literature about the processes and strategies that facilitators can use to develop their skills, understanding and experience. The facilitation literature would also benefit if authors were more explicit about their assumptions or philosophies on how they believe facilitators develop.

In conclusion, The Dimensions of Facilitator Education Model presented in this chapter has been developed to provide an interpretive framework for continued research and discussion about facilitator education. Hopefully, it will contribute to the facilitation profession in an OD context by providing a richer understanding of the assumptions, philosophies, and processes in facilitator education.

Acknowledgments
The author would first like to acknowledge the guidance of Associate Professor Lorraine Ling (PhD) from La Trobe University, Melbourne, Victoria. Secondly, thanks and appreciation to the workshop participants at the Australasian Facilitators’ Network Conference in November, 2003 who provided valuable comments on an earlier version of this chapter.

Biography
Glyn Thomas is a lecturer at La Trobe University, Bendigo, Australia. His main teaching area is in the area of outdoor leadership with a particular focus on facilitation and his research interests lie in the area of facilitator education. Glyn has 18 years experience facilitating groups in a broad range of educational and organizational contexts and he is passionately committed to helping individuals and groups with their development.

References


