



## **Section 3:**

# **Teaching Through Facilitation**

## **Learning New Ways, Unlearning The Old**

As adult education practitioners, we generally agree on some basic ground rules in adult learning, based on the work of Malcolm Knowles among others, which form the basis of our understanding of the adult learner. For example:

- Adults are motivated to learn when they can identify that they have a need to learn and can see the subject's relevance to their lives;
- Adults learn best when learning is active rather than passive and involves experiences, more than lecture;
- Tapping into prior knowledge is essential to learning, as much of what adults retain in long-term memory builds on what they already know.

While we increasingly understand how adults learn, how



we teach to achieve the best results is more problematic. Research indicates that we teach in the ways that we have been taught. Few of us, however, were taught in ways now suggested by research to promote effective learning in adulthood. Thus when we teach, we need to develop our professional judgment and our ability to ask questions, build active learning environments and engage our learners in inquiry, styles we rarely, if ever, experienced in school. This means using workbooks sparingly and resisting pre-teaching and telling learners the answer without first asking them a few questions to understand their thinking processes better. This guide suggests that adult educators learn how to facilitate learning instead.

**Facilitated learning is active learning.** It engages the student in the project at hand. It encourages the student to think about the thinking that he/she is using to solve a problem. It centers on the student's discovering an answer for himself/herself, often with the help of a fellow student or a small group. The facilitated classroom creates opportunities for critical thinking and evaluation, central to passing the GED 2002.

Jennifer Cromley, in her book *Learning to Think, Learning to Learn*, (1998) defines active learning as "where students figure things out for themselves and participate in discussion, activities and projects" (p. 147).

Just as the GED 2002 borrows materials from the workplace to be more relevant to our learners' lives, GED instructors can borrow from the facilitation skills used in the workplace to teach the GED. *The Practical Guide to Facilitation*, by Farrell and Weaver, (2000) states that "facilitation is the most important role to emerge in the modern workplace" (p. 21). "...[T]he workplace is changing as never before, and effective facilitators are able to help individuals...adapt and thrive in the face of these changes." This is a real need in our learners' lives today.

If we are to be active learning facilitators, and our goal is to help students pass the GED test, how do we undergo the transformation from teacher to facilitator? Reflection is a good place to start.

## **Reflecting On Your Values As A Facilitator**

We can learn much from how good facilitators operate and how they help groups function. As a means of reflecting on facilitation and understanding where your strengths and weaknesses lie as a facilitator, Figure B, developed by Dr. Nancy Berger of Training for Performance, Inc., provides a list



of characteristics of successful facilitators. Look through this list and identify where you are most comfortable as an instructor. Which skills pose a challenge for you? How will you strengthen these areas?

## Figure B

### What are some skills/characteristics of effective facilitators?

- Professional image and outlook
- Sensitivity for others
- Sense of humor
- Ability to establish and maintain enthusiasm
- Ability to show empathy
- Patience
- Ability to make decisions
- Ability to display warmth and establish rapport with participants
- Skill in asking questions
- Ability to interpret verbal and nonverbal communication
- Understanding of the nuances of small group process
- Listening skills and memory
- Ability to lead the group to consensus
- Ability to motivate and encourage the participants

### Facilitator's job — when facilitating you should:

- Use active listening skills
- Interpret and use non-verbal communication
- Show patience
- Use/allow silence
- Repress personal biases
- Set and maintain a steady pace
- Lead the discussion
- Maintain group participation
- Use questions to probe
- Summarize statements
- Use reinforcement
- Help participants state tasks correctly
- Lead the group to consensus
- Make decisions
- Deal with difficult participants

Dr. Nancy Berger  
*Training for Performance, 1999*

Our best and most important tool for this job, beyond our resources and experience, is our value system in the context of facilitation. What do we prioritize in our classrooms? What do we allow and encourage? How must we stretch ourselves to give the process to the learners rather than retaining control of every aspect ourselves?

Your personal values, what you consider to be important, have a major impact on how you might facilitate. In Your Values Inventory (Figure C) on page 8, we reflect on and clarify the values that you bring to your facilitation role. Explore your perspective, looking for those values that may make fulfilling the role of facilitator in the classroom more difficult. Ask yourself if you are willing to adjust these values and begin to imagine how you might begin to do so.

The goal of this exercise is to recognize and balance your preferences for the benefit of the learning group. This awareness can affect your facilitation style and, ultimately, your success in teaching the GED 2002, using the *GED as Project* approach.

Once you have taken the time to reflect on your own aptitude and attitude toward the qualities and values of a facilitator as opposed to those of a teacher, consider the following tips for developing your facilitative style.

## The Facilitative Style

The professional judgment of the instructor makes all the difference in a classroom. Professional competence and professional judgment determine how a classroom operates. Developing a learning environment where learners are central requires that the instructor exercise effective professional judgment and commit to continuing professional development. Deciding to instruct in a more facilitative manner will lead to greater learner achievement

## Small Group Instruction

Over time, facilitators become experts in handling groups. Pairs, triads, small groups and large groups all become fertile ground for ensuring that the learner is central through facilitated discussion in the quest for deeper understanding. A facilitator needs to learn to assure the students from the beginning that the classroom environment is non-threatening and safe. Students may need to be invited and encouraged to take the risk of speaking up. The way you arrange your classroom, such as seating students in a circle or at tables instead of the standard rows, can also increase the effectiveness of group instruction.



You will want to develop diplomatic methods of controlling the non-stop talker, as well as asking the right questions that bring out the reluctant speaker. For a simple, to-the-point tip sheet on how to handle group instruction, see Appendix 1, created by Dr. Tom Valentine, Associate Professor, University of Georgia.

**On Asking Questions**

For some of us, developing skill in asking, rather than answering, questions may need attention. This involves understanding the small group process so that the group generates answers to the open-ended questions you ask. It involves leading a group to consensus, being an active listener, and using and allowing silence for think time, all of which may not be common in our classrooms.

Questions are best when they encourage learners to think and answer with more than yes or no. Instead of asking “did you learn...,” ask “what did you learn?,” “how did you learn?,” or “why did you...” The W and H questions (who, what when, where, why and how) are a great tool for assuring that our questions ask for information from our learners. Learners want to answer questions correctly. If a question asks, “What

is needed to solve the problem?” they might hesitate in answering because they *might* get the answer wrong. However, if you ask what might be needed, no answer can be wrong, and learners will participate more freely. In addition, ask “In what ways would you/could you...?” emphasizing the plural, so that more than one thought can be shared by more than one learner. In conclusion, consider questions that:

- Ask for more than yes or no answers using “who, what, where, when, why or how”
- Use “might” in your questions
- Use “in what ways?” to encourage many responses

**Slow Down To Speed Up**

Don’t be surprised if you only cover one or two Inquiry Activities per class period. “Teaching for understanding takes longer than teaching by rote.” In fact, “Experts... tend to have very well-connected knowledge (not just more knowledge)” (Cromley, 1998, page 14). Slowing down instruction speeds up good learning and lessens the chance of having to present the same material again. After learners have slowly gone through this process, they will start to follow it automatically, and the content learning increases. It is important that the

**Figure C**

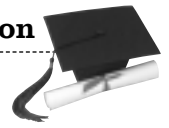
**Your Values Inventory**

Check one choice from each pair below. Either choice can be helpful. Just be aware that your choices affect how you facilitate.

- |  |              |  |
|--|--------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Completing tasks . . . . .                    | OR . . . . . | <input type="checkbox"/> Having good interactions              |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Working in broad strokes . . . . .            | OR . . . . . | <input type="checkbox"/> Making sure the details are right     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Getting everyone to participate . . . . .     | OR . . . . . | <input type="checkbox"/> Getting work done quickly             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Avoiding conflict . . . . .                   | OR . . . . . | <input type="checkbox"/> Facing conflict                       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Working from a plan . . . . .                 | OR . . . . . | <input type="checkbox"/> Being spontaneous                     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Responding to events . . . . .                | OR . . . . . | <input type="checkbox"/> Managing what occurs                  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Letting people be quiet . . . . .             | OR . . . . . | <input type="checkbox"/> Insisting people speak                |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Letting people be loud . . . . .              | OR . . . . . | <input type="checkbox"/> Maintaining quieter atmosphere        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Tolerating disruptions . . . . .              | OR . . . . . | <input type="checkbox"/> Avoiding disruptions                  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Focusing almost exclusively on work . . . . . | OR . . . . . | <input type="checkbox"/> Focusing almost exclusively on people |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Getting to solutions quickly . . . . .        | OR . . . . . | <input type="checkbox"/> Learning more about the problem       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Following the group’s rules . . . . .         | OR . . . . . | <input type="checkbox"/> Bending rules wherever necessary      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Ignoring disrespectful behavior . . . . .     | OR . . . . . | <input type="checkbox"/> Confronting disrespectful behavior    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Working on consensus . . . . .                | OR . . . . . | <input type="checkbox"/> Agreeing to disagree                  |



*Used with permission The Practical Guide to Facilitation (1999) HRD Press*



learners go through the process. When you introduce the inquiry process, it is likely that learners will want to focus only on getting the right answer and not pursue all the steps. This is natural, because our idea of learning stresses getting the right answer. If a learner arrives at the right answer quickly and consistently, using a variety of stimuli, that person may be ready to sit for the GED exam. However, if getting the right answer is challenging, then instructors should maintain use of the inquiry process. Getting the right answers without following the complete inquiry process is not necessarily solving the problem.

### Facilitating ‘The Spiral Curriculum’

While many of us are familiar with Bruner’s spiral curriculum (Bruner, 1960), few curricula are designed around it. According to Wiggins & McTighe in *Understanding by Design* (1998), most curricula are still developed as scope-and-sequence, parceling out topics in a linear way.

Wiggins & McTighe cite the standard arguments: “Students need to learn all the basics before they perform” or “Inexperienced students are not ready to do complex tasks.” Because of these firmly-held ideas, we front load our topics to the point that the students are often bored or frustrated by the slow and tedious linear march and have given up study before getting to the more interesting questions.

Using *GED as Project* provides the opportunity to introduce interesting, multi-faceted problems appropriate to the class early in the learning process. The inquiry process facilitates the learners’ thinking process so that they can, with guidance, take apart the problem, discover the pieces of information they will need to approach it, and develop the skills from within the problem itself. As their study continues, instruction will spiral back to build up fundamental knowledge and reinforce new learning. As the learners work through more problems, the relationships of skills necessary for finding solutions to several problems will become evident to them.



This is not to say that there is no order to the learning. This guide’s Learning Projects will provide some sequence, organizing the general topics into a manageable, overarching flow, but generally the knowledge and skills gained in the Inquiry Activities themselves will be dictated by problem requirements and not by an instructional scope-and-sequence design.

### Trust The Process

“The GED and You” and “GED Math and You” (or other subjects) sections help to prepare the students for the process they will experience while studying for the GED 2002. But once we begin delving into the content areas, it will be tempting to revert to old habits and pre-teach by modeling new concepts and ideas, rather than allowing the students to try it themselves. We will need to challenge ourselves to trust the process of facilitation and the inquiry process template which call on us to allow for discovery and exploration first.

### Is There A Place For Direct Instruction?

Direct instruction does have its place providing crucial information and stability to a class, particularly when students may be looking for answers and getting too frustrated to find them. It can be necessary and helpful after the students have made the attempt themselves, sorting out the pieces, evaluating and calling on all prior knowledge and each other to tackle the problem at hand. Sometimes when the answers are so obscure, or the direction the learners are taking brings them to a point too confusing, it is time for the facilitator to intervene. This guide calls these interventions Burst Lectures. Burst Lectures are done on the spot, when an assessment done Just-In-Time reveals that more information is necessary to keep the thinking and problem solving process moving forward. (See page

10 for a discussion of Just-In-Time assessment.)

Good facilitation, built on a solid process and effective professional judgment, creates synergy within the class. This is when “the whole is greater than the sum of its parts” (Farrell & Weaver, 2000.) When allowed to develop, it will lead to learning, improved thinking skills and test-taking success.