



FACILITATION WITH PEOPLE EXPERIENCING POVERTY

ANN HEGARTY
WITH MARJA ALMQVIST



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PREFACE

Combat Poverty is a statutory advisory agency that works for a poverty-free Ireland. One of the principles that inform our work is that, in order to tackle poverty effectively, it is necessary to involve and empower people and communities affected by poverty.

Facilitation skills are an important tool for empowerment and for giving expression to the voices of the excluded.

In recent years, a number of new contexts have emerged for people and sectors working on anti-poverty and social inclusion issues. These include the National Action Plan against Poverty and Social Exclusion, the integration of local government and local development, the incorporation of social inclusion into health policy and programmes, the establishment of regeneration programmes such as RAPID and CLAR, and the establishment of county childcare committees and local drugs task forces.

In addition, the Community Development Support Programme, the National Anti-Poverty Networks, the EU Peace and Reconciliation Programme and other programmes continue to support people living in poverty so they can express their views, contribute towards, and play a

meaningful role in the process of change towards social inclusion and equality.

This book is a companion to another Combat Poverty publication by Patricia Prendiville, *Developing Facilitation Skills*, which is a broader resource on facilitation.

With this new book, *Facilitation with People Experiencing Poverty*, Combat Poverty aims to support and strengthen the skills base of those who facilitate work with people experiencing poverty, be they volunteers, activists, management committee members, trainers or paid staff in statutory bodies.

The first part of the book focuses on poverty, equality and diversity and their relevance to group facilitation in contemporary Ireland. Part 2 deals with ways to widen participation. It addresses literacy, anti-racism and understanding learning styles.

Combat Poverty very much appreciates the skill, knowledge and enthusiasm of Ann Hegarty and Marja Almqvist in ensuring that this publication is practical and provides good quality information. Their experience of working with groups has been an important influence on the quality and relevance of this book.

May 2005



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks to all who have had an involvement in the process of completing this book. The early thinking was informed by the Meitheal training panel, Catherine Dowling, Marie Harding, Annette Halpin, Mick Scully and Conor Rowley. From those early discussions key elements to be included in the text were identified and further developed by Marja Almqvist and myself.

Since then, the text has been informed by advice from the staff in Meitheal who have wide-ranging experience of facilitation with people, groups and communities who experience poverty. Thanks to Helen White, Maeve Healy, Julie Uí

Chróinín and Annette Hannon. The administration team in Meitheal has also patiently supported the process and I am grateful to Rosemary Cadwell and Audrey Lawlor.

A special word of thanks and appreciation goes to Patricia Prendiville and Maggie Feeley who commented on the work as it progressed.

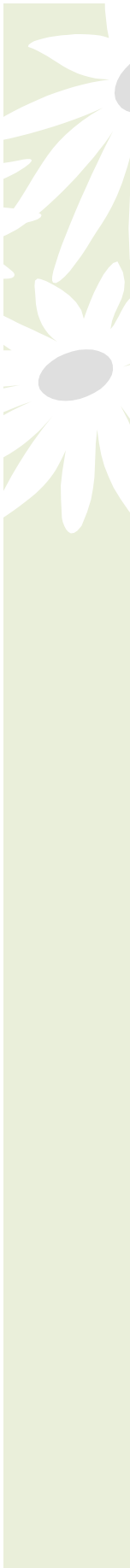
A final word of appreciation to Joan O'Flynn and her colleagues in the Combat Poverty Agency who commissioned and guided this text through the stages of its evolution.

Ann Hegarty
Meitheal

May 2005

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INTRODUCTION

What is this book about?

This book deals with facilitation in the context of community-based or anti-poverty work. It explores how facilitators can best ensure that those experiencing poverty are more equally included in groups. It concentrates on the anti-poverty potential of facilitation, therefore it assumes the reader is familiar with the core general principles of facilitation, as outlined in the book, *Developing Facilitation Skills*.¹

Although many more people from disadvantaged communities are taking control of their own community development, many facilitators still come from outside these communities. Whether they are from within or without the community, the facilitator may not have had the opportunity to reflect, discuss and develop an analysis of poverty. A facilitator that understands the issues related to all dimensions of inequality is more likely to work with people who experience poverty in a way that is appropriate and affirming.

Developing more effective ways of working with cultural diversity will help the facilitator to ensure that people who are poor or marginalised will be better represented in the group. This will help to empower people in disadvantaged communities and promote greater levels of equality.

What do we mean by poverty in Ireland?

"People are living in poverty if their income and resources (material, cultural and social) are so inadequate as to preclude them from having a standard of living which is regarded as acceptable by Irish society generally. As a result of inadequate income and resources people may be excluded and marginalised from participating in activities which are considered the norm for other people in society²."

Eight main indicators measure poverty. These indicators were set in 1987.

Poverty means not having:

- new, but second-hand clothes;
- a meal with meat, fish or chicken every second day;
- a warm waterproof overcoat;
- two pairs of strong shoes;
- a roast or its equivalent once a week.

or conversely, having:

- debt problems arising from ordinary living expenses;
- a day in the last two weeks without a substantial meal;
- to go without heating during the last year through lack of money.

If a household falls below 70 per cent of average income and also

1 Prendiville, Patricia (2004), *Developing Facilitation Skills: A Handbook for Facilitators*, Dublin: Combat Poverty Agency

2 Government of Ireland (1997), *Sharing in Progress*, Dublin: National Anti-Poverty Strategy



lacks at least one of the items in the basic deprivation list, it is said to experience consistent poverty and deprivation.

Why is there a need for this book?

To tackle poverty and social exclusion, facilitators need to find ways to encourage and hear the voices of the experts on poverty - the poor. They are the people who experience poverty and exclusion on a daily basis. They are also the people who can best articulate their needs and plan for personal, community and social change.

Facilitation is not a neutral act. It can replicate existing inequalities or it has the potential to bring about radical change that leads to a more caring, just and equal society for all.

To work effectively with people and groups who have firsthand experience of poverty, the facilitator needs to bring particular awareness, understanding and skills to the facilitation process.

To best do this, it is essential that facilitators first reflect on their own beliefs and attitudes towards the causes and effects of poverty, inequality and discrimination. This, in turn, will help them to be clear about their personal motivation for doing this political work.

This book is intended as a more detailed companion piece to *Developing Facilitation Skills*, a

Combat Poverty Agency publication by Patricia Prendiville, where some of the basic principles of group facilitation are described. In particular it expands on Chapter 10 of that text, which deals with accommodating diversity in groups and aims to fill a gap in the original text.

Who is this book for?

This book is intended for people who have some previous experience in facilitation and working in community based or anti-poverty contexts.

The focus is on working in an anti-poverty context. The book goes more deeply into the theoretical background of issues that underpin a social justice approach to group facilitation work. It also carries through the theme of the personal development of the facilitator, outlined in *Developing Facilitation Skills*.

What are the practice implications for facilitators who are working with groups who experience poverty?

When working in an anti-poverty or community-based setting, to ensure that the voice and experience of participants can really be heard, facilitators will need to pay particular attention to creating an environment:

- that is safe;
- where participants can

participate equally and really be heard and respected;

- where an action-focused approach can be taken to looking at strategies that will ultimately lead to a fairer society.

When facilitators reflect on and challenge their attitudes about poverty, and discuss these reflections with other practitioners, they can clarify their thinking. This can help them devise strategies that will ensure that people in the group enjoy an equal and enhancing experience. Practice that promotes equality and participation can flow from such reflection and strategies.

How to use this book

The book is divided into two sections.

Part 1: Understanding Poverty, Inequality and Diversity focuses on themes of poverty, equality and diversity and their relevance to group facilitation in contemporary Ireland. Readers are given the opportunity to explore these themes through reflective exercises, which relate to personal attitudes and experiences. These exercises can be used individually, with peers, and with groups.

At times throughout the text the reader will be asked to focus on different aspects of the facilitation process. These are clearly marked. *Spotlight on the facilitator* aims to

help the facilitator to analyse their own relationship to the work and to the issues of poverty, inequality and discrimination. *Spotlight on practice* provides some practice tips. Finally, *Spotlight on group work* provides exercises that can be used with groups in exploring relevant themes.

To get the most out of this book, the reader should take the time to work through these reflections and exercises. By confronting assumptions, attitudes and perhaps bias held towards other groups in society and seeing how they influence their own interaction with others, facilitators can improve their practice and the experience of those with whom they work.

This process of critical thinking is not easy. The 'thinker' may feel resistance, resentment and confusion. They may also feel joy, relief and exhilaration as they break through to new ways of understanding and naming core life issues.

Part 2: Widening Participation looks at widening participation in groups. This section looks at literacy, anti-racism and learning styles. It suggests some practical guidelines for facilitators on how to create a more inclusive learning environment.

It is hoped that this book will enrich and enhance facilitation practice, increase confidence in





skills and ensure that work with groups who experience poverty and inequality becomes ever more focused and effective.

Thinking about facilitation

"Facilitation is a way of working with people. Facilitation enables and empowers people to carry out a task or perform an action. The facilitator does not perform the task, but uses certain skills in a process, which allows the individuals/group reach their decision, set their goal, learn a skill.

"Facilitation is a developmental educational method, which encourages people to share ideas, resources, opinions and to think critically in order to identify needs and find effective ways of satisfying those needs³."

In this way facilitation can be a tool for developing communities. Community development challenges disadvantage and inequality. It works towards the achievement of an equal and inclusive society and it requires active and meaningful participation and learning from those most disadvantaged by society's systems.

The principles of equality, inclusion, participation, collectivity and affirmation are inherent in facilitation and community development. In group terms, this means recognising the value of each person's contribution and

encouraging each group member to actively identify and use her/his skills, experience, creativity and analysis. This collective understanding and sharing of skills and experience enables people and groups to better plan for development and change. Change can be at many different and intersecting levels: personal, collective, community and societal. In the final analysis, such change has the potential to create greater levels of social justice for all.

Spotlight on the Facilitator



Why are you involved in community development work?

What are your beliefs about the purpose of community development work?

Challenges of the role

Facilitating in an anti-poverty setting can be difficult and challenging work. It is important that facilitators are clear about their own boundaries regarding each piece of work that they do. Taking time to clarify these boundaries in advance can help both the work and the facilitator in the long run. Setting ground rules for oneself can help this process.

The facilitator may be part of a triangular relationship – the funder, the group and the facilitator. This relationship needs careful management. The needs, requirements and motivations of

3 Prendiville, Patricia (2004), *Developing Facilitation Skills: A Handbook for Facilitators*, Dublin: Combat Poverty Agency

any one of the three can be at variance with one another. Having a clear analysis of one's own motivation for doing the work can help a facilitator successfully negotiate this relationship. Spending time discussing the needs of the funders and the group can help clarify expectations. From this a realistic and useful session or series of sessions can be planned.

Work that is about achieving real change for equality and social justice is hard. Change takes time. Be realistic about what can be achieved in any piece of work. Put some support and supervision mechanism in place for yourself in the work. This can be from peers, from the contracting organisation or from external organisations who have expertise in role support and supervision.

Finally, facilitators are not perfect and neither do they need to be. Mistakes will be made but they can be a sound basis from which to continue to learn and hone facilitation skills for this political work.





PART 1

UNDERSTANDING POVERTY, INEQUALITY AND DIVERSITY

"The more people care about equality, the more will be done to eliminate poverty⁴."

Why should we care about poverty?

We should care about poverty because we are human beings, interconnected and part of one another. At the heart of poverty lies inequality and discrimination.

It makes sense economically, socially, politically and culturally to invest in all people in society. Ignoring people and communities who live in poverty is wasteful and has the potential to create political and social instability⁵.

When people are not poor, they are able to contribute to society and to the State. They cost the State less. Citizens are healthier and happier when they are in satisfying and meaningful employment. There is less crime. People are cared for and educated and no one is homeless or hungry.

This is social justice, fairness, and common sense.

Did you know?

- In 2003, consistent poverty levels were 9.4 per cent⁶.
- In 2003 relative income poverty was 22.7 per cent.
- The proportion of women at risk of poverty, after pensions and social transfers, was 23 per cent in Ireland in 2001. This was the highest rate in the 25 EU member states.
- In 2003, 14.6 per cent of children under 15 experienced consistent poverty.
- 7 per cent of older people live in consistent poverty in Ireland.
- Life expectancy in Ireland was the lowest in the EU before recent enlargement (2004).
- Households headed by a person with a disability have one of the highest risks of poverty in Ireland.
- A proportion of those living in poverty is lesbian gay or bisexual⁷.

Spotlight on the facilitator



How do you feel when you read these figures?
Are you shocked?
Are you angry?
Are you surprised at the groups that feature in statistics about poverty?

4 Baker, John (2003), *Poverty and Inequality: Applying an Equality Dimension to Poverty Proofing*, Ireland: Combat Poverty Agency

5 Lynch, Kathleen (1999), *Equality in Education*, Dublin: Gill and Macmillan

6 See www.cso.ie/eusilc

7 www.combatpoverty.ie This site provides latest data on poverty in Ireland



Getting in touch with how you *feel* about poverty and inequality is a good starting place for the facilitator. Feelings play a crucial role in bringing about change and can be great motivators.

In the context of group facilitation, our response to poverty can be to co-operate in naming, analysing and tackling the causes of poverty together. The facilitator's first step in this process is to explore personal attitudes and beliefs about poverty and people who are poor. An analysis based on reflection can, in turn, inform and critically affect our approach to facilitation in an anti-poverty context.



Spotlight on the facilitator / Spotlight on group work

Social analysis of poverty

Aim: To explore the influence of social structures on perceptions and experiences of poverty.

A social analysis is a way of exploring and understanding the influence and impact of society's structures on personal lives, on judgements, beliefs, and values.

The exercise can be done on many social issues, such as education, the healthcare system or the position of women in society.

Here are some questions to guide you in doing a social analysis on poverty:

Personal level

What are the ideas/beliefs that you hold about poverty?

What are the ideas /beliefs you hold about people who are poor?

Where did these ideas and beliefs come from?

Community level

What are the beliefs of people around you about poverty?

What are the messages about poverty from school, Churches, in other local groups?

How are poorer people in your community viewed, treated or supported?

What are the sources of information about poverty and the poor?

National level

What are the national policies and laws that influence poverty?

Who makes decisions about them? What is their background?

What are the economic structures that influence poverty in Ireland today?

How are issues about poverty presented in the media?

Global

Where are the richest countries in the world today?

Where are the poorest?

Where are the decisions made about the distribution of global resources and who is represented in the decision-making process?

From this review of how poverty is viewed in these different contexts,

are there conclusions to be drawn about:

- The accuracy of commonly held 'truths' about poverty?
- The link between people's personal beliefs and experience of poverty and the community, national and global structures that influence those beliefs?
- Who benefits from these structures and as a result who loses out?
- If there is to be a more equal society, what needs to change at the different levels – individual, community, national and global?

What does it mean to be poor?

To understand the breadth and depth of the impact of poverty on the lives of people and communities, an Equality Framework is useful. The Equality Studies Centre at University College Dublin has developed such a framework of analysis. It can be used to understand the complex and intricately interwoven strands that make up equality and the way in which poverty is experienced.

The four main areas of equality contained in the framework interconnect and overlap.

The Equality Framework

Equality of resources

Resource equality describes the **right to a fair share of society's resources** - wealth, income, goods and services, among individuals, families, organisations and communities. The current unequal distribution of society's resources results in privilege for the few and disadvantage for many.

Equality of love and care

Affective equality describes the **right of everyone to love, care and solidarity and the chance to form loving relationships**. This theme highlights the importance of feeling valued, being appreciated and having a sense of belonging.

Equality of respect and recognition

Cultural equality describes the **right of everyone to autonomy and personal freedom**. It raises issues of respect and recognition for difference and for different needs based on class, race, gender, physical and mental capacity, sexual orientation, family status, religious or political affiliation in urban or rural environments.

Equality of representation

Political equality describes the **right to the protection of human and political rights**. It highlights the unequal distribution of power and representation given to different individuals and groups in society. It is intricately connected to access to decision making and the rigidity of structures that are designed to exclude the most marginalised – those whose 'voice' goes unheard.



How can this framework be used as a tool to help sharpen facilitation practice?

What picture emerges when this framework is used to look at the way people experience poverty in their daily lives?

When people and groups don't have an equal share of resources they may:

- Have less for everything – from the most basic needs of food and clothing to the more costly comforts of life;
- Benefit less from education. This can include less access to extra-curricular activities, books, school trips and additional classes;
- Experience literacy difficulties;
- Be in poor health;
- Be more likely to be in prison;
- Be more at risk of homelessness;
- Be less likely to be in satisfying and fulfilling employment;
- Have a poorer quality of life compared to the privileged in society.

When people don't have affective equality they may:

- Lack self-esteem;
- Feel isolated, alienated and insecure;
- Fear debt and being unable to make ends meet;

- Participate less in groups and lose the benefit of such support networks;
- Have less opportunity to form and sustain caring and loving relationships;
- Feel powerless;
- Feel their choices are limited.

Not enjoying respect and recognition may have the result that:

- People are more likely to be stereotyped;
- People and groups are more likely to be seen as lazy and ineffectual;
- The norms and values of people who are working class, Travellers, ethnic minorities, lesbian, gay, bisexual and people with disabilities are seen to be of less value by those who belong to the mainstream, dominant, white, middle-class, heterosexual, patriarchal culture;
- People's accents, customs, ways of dressing and activities are seen as inferior and open to ridicule.

People and groups who do not have equal representation may:

- Find themselves being spoken for / about;
- Have no bargaining power;
- Be less likely to influence government priorities and policies;

- Go unheard or have no say in decisions that directly affect their lives.

The Equality Framework shows that poverty is not only about having or not having money. It is linked with other dimensions of equality and power – economic, affective, social, cultural and political.

Poverty and diversity

People who are poor are not all the same. They include members of migrant and ethnic minorities, Travellers, lesbian, gay and bisexual people, children, older people, women, one-parent families, and people with disabilities.

It makes good sense to recognise and acknowledge difference.

No group of people is the same; no two people are alike. There is rich diversity in every group and diversity is a core principle of the work of equality. Diversity is the norm.

On the surface people may look and even dress alike. However, one can never assume that individuals in any group have the same life experience, attitudes or values as other members of the group, or, indeed, as the group facilitator.

These differences can add richness to a group, at the level both of task (what is being done) and process (how it is being done). Embracing and encouraging diversity can

broaden and add to the experience of people working in a group. If we deny diversity we discriminate against, exclude and deny people's unique existence. If a group welcomes diversity it will have a wider breadth of experience, skills and knowledge to draw from. This can provide a richer analysis of needs and a more inclusive, cohesive and creative plan to address those needs.

"People have a right to be different because they are different. Society's response to difference in people's identities creates the conditions for how they access and participate in social, and economic resources, for how they are included or excluded, oppressed or free⁸."

Understanding diversity

There are three basic elements to understanding diversity. These are, each person's unique individual personality, status and culture. The most fundamental is the person's unique personality. A person's experiences, talents and unique style of interacting with the world have a fundamental bearing on her or his way of being with and relating to other people.

The key to inclusion is to have an ongoing awareness, recognition and respect for the uniqueness of each person in the group. For this level of understanding to take place participants need to trust that they are working in a safe

8 Zappone, Katherine, Ed. (2003), *Re-thinking Identity: The Challenge of Diversity*, Dublin: Joint Equality and Human Rights Forum



environment where open, respectful dialogue occurs. Status is the second dimension of diversity. This relates to the social position assigned to each person by themselves and by the group. People automatically assume a level of power and privilege if they come from a section of society that is recognised to be powerful and privileged. How status is determined and acknowledged varies from culture to culture. This can be acted out in group relationships and can often lead to the further oppression of group members. This needs careful management and attention by both the facilitator and the group.

Culture is the third dimension of diversity. Culture can be difficult to define because it is complex and evolving.

"Everybody has a culture. It is a package of customs, traditions, symbols, values and phrases and other forms of communication by which we belong to a community...Culture is the way we learn to think, behave and do things⁹."

Culture consists of the ideals, values and assumptions about life that are widely shared among people and that guide specific behaviours.

Understanding and communication are at the core of working with each of these elements of diversity.

A facilitator who wishes to welcome difference within a group needs to create a learning and listening environment with the group. That does not mean that everybody has to agree with one another. But it does mean that people have to agree to listen and respect each other's point of view.

Spotlight on the facilitator



Spotlight

How do you respond to difference in your own life?
How do you respond to difference in your work as a facilitator?

Internalised Oppression

Oppression is the "unjust or cruel exercise of authority or power¹⁰" and is closely linked to discrimination. When people or groups are marginalised, discriminated against or oppressed, they can, over a period of time, internalise the myths that society has constructed around them. This, in turn, can lead to feelings of being worthless, of self-blame, of not being as good as other people or groups in society. The myths are so strong and so powerful that people and groups begin to believe them to be true. This is internalised oppression. It is a destructive force, damaging for individuals, groups and society. It stops people from reaching their full potential and it can divide people within a group thus weakening the power of that group to achieve change.

⁹ *Report of the Task Force on the Travelling Community* (1995), Dublin: Government of Ireland.

¹⁰ *The Merriam-Webster Dictionary* (2004), USA: Mass Market Paperback

To carry out any work successfully with people who experience poverty, one must ensure that they do not experience in the facilitated group all the inequalities and oppression they encounter in the wider society.

Oppression and inequality are fuelled by the misuse of power. The very word 'power' conjures up conflicting feelings and memories for different people. For some it can call up feelings of strength, joy, creativity and energy. For others it can invoke feelings of anger, resentment, negativity and oppression. This individual and collective experience of power in both personal and public lives will strongly influence the group dynamic.



Spotlight on the facilitator

The following questions aim to encourage the facilitator to reflect on his or her relationship with power and the interaction of this power with the group.

Think of the different levels of power that you have – affective, cultural, economic and political. Name for yourself the power you have in the different contexts.

- What gives you this power?
- How might the groups you are working with perceive this power?
- How might this affect the group?

- How might it affect you?
- Have you ever been in a group where you have felt powerless?
- What feelings did that bring up for you?
- Think about the groups you work with. What power are you assuming they have? Think again about the different contexts – affective, cultural, economic and political.
- What can be done to share power in the relationship between the facilitator and the group?

What can the facilitator do to prepare for working with people and groups who are poor?

As already stated, the first step for any facilitator working in this context is to analyse and understand for themselves the systemic causes of poverty. Based on this informed and critical standpoint, a facilitator can then approach the work from a more sensitive position.

Thinking about and discussing poverty can raise powerful and deeply felt emotions, particularly when a person or people in a group have intimate experience of poverty and its reality. These feelings can range from anger, guilt, sadness and despair to shame, and self-blame. These feelings can give rise to actions and behaviour that may



result in further oppression, silencing and disempowerment.

Managing these emotions, feelings and behaviours will be the work of the facilitator and the group. Taking time to agree ground rules for working together at the beginning of each session will help to create safety for the group. These ground rules should form a list that everyone, including the facilitator, can agree on. It is useful to regularly revisit these ground rules so that they are 'lived' and developed by the group, as they become more familiar with one another and the group process.

A key question for the facilitator and the group will be:
How can we ensure that oppression is not experienced in this group?



Spotlight on the group

Aim: To create a working environment that is free from oppression.

Figure 1

Oppression and society

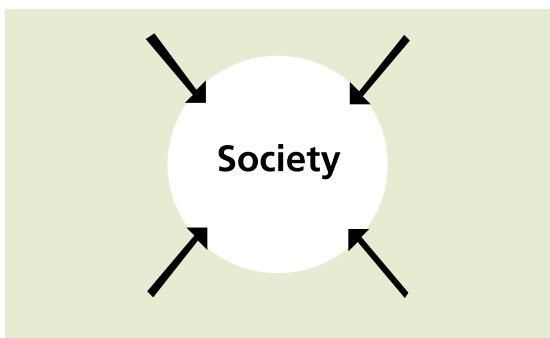
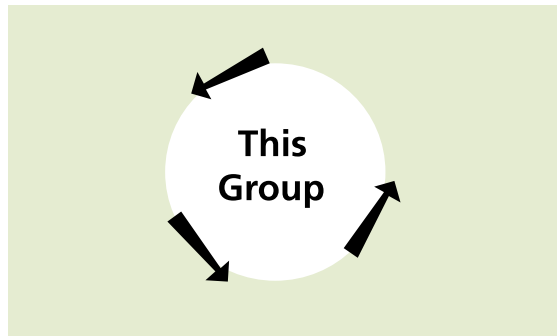


Figure 2

Oppression and this group



Method

- Draw these diagrams on the flipchart. The arrows in Figure 1 represent oppression. The arrows in Figure 2 represent creative energy.
- Use these diagrams as the basis for a brainstorm or small group work followed by collective discussion and agreement as appropriate to group numbers.

Figure 1

- Who are the groups who are oppressed by society?
- How do such groups feel and experience oppression and powerlessness?
- What are the beliefs and values that underpin this oppression?
- Why does this happen?

Figure 2

- What can be done within this group to ensure that people do not feel oppressed or powerless?

- What are the beliefs and values that will underpin the work of this group?

From this discussion, agree and draw up a group contract. A group contract is an agreement made by the members of a group that names the types of behaviours and expectations of each other that are acceptable for that group. Group contracts help to maintain safety for group members. A contract can include issues such as respect, confidentiality, listening and time-keeping. As groups change and develop over time it is useful to include within the contract a timeframe for evaluation in order that these changes and developments can be reflected in the contract.

What can the facilitator and group do to create a space where participants can participate equally and be really heard, respected and listened to?

When trying to create a facilitated space whose ethos and practice are grounded in equality, a facilitator could use the four-stranded Equality Framework to set out some questions that might be used as a checklist. The questions could also be used to evaluate the work of the group.

Equality of resources

- How are materials shared in the group?
- How does one ensure that costs of learning will be covered in order that there be equal participation?

Equality of love, care and solidarity

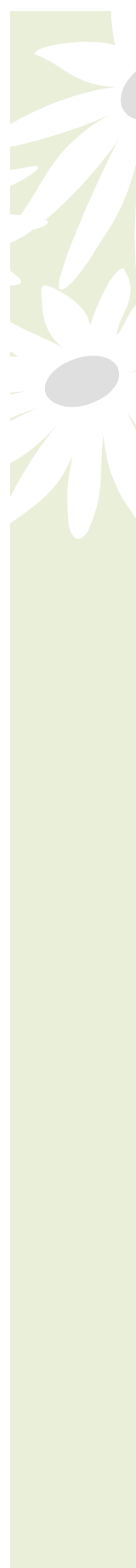
- How are the individual caring responsibilities catered for when organising groups?
- Is there a collective approach to learning?
- How are relationships of trust developed among group members?
- How are achievements celebrated in the group?

Equality of respect and recognition

- How is difference named in the group?
- How is difference catered for?
- How is difference valued and celebrated?
- How are different learning styles / experiences recognised?
- How are the expressed needs of learners heard and acted upon?
- How are cultural differences reflected in the content of learning materials?

Equality of representation

- How are decisions made in the group?
- How is participation encouraged?
- How does one ensure that all voices and viewpoints are equally represented in the group?
- What evaluation system is in place in order that feedback can actively direct the programme development?





- Is it part of the group's role to campaign for a more equal, democratic society?

Spotlight on group work



Aim: To raise awareness of representation



Photo: The Dáil table



Photo: The Community table

Study the photographs on page 20

- What do you imagine are the norms and values at the two tables?
- How are people expected to behave, interact, dress?
- Are there similarities?
- What are the differences?
- How can the voice of the Community table be heard at the Dáil table?
- How can the voice of the Dáil table be heard at the Community table?
- How can you ensure that your group is representative and inclusive?

What can the facilitator and group do to take an action-focused approach to poverty?

This question highlights the importance of establishing, developing and sustaining strong networks and solidarity relationships with others involved in anti-poverty work. There are many sources of information and support and some of the most useful are listed in the final section of this book.

Good quality, authentic dialogue underpins and strengthens these relationships.

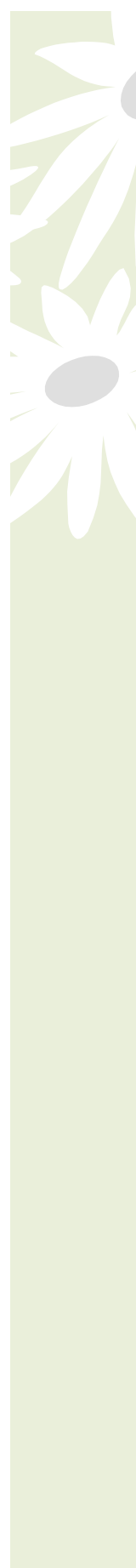
Dialogue

One of the tools for bringing about change is open and democratic dialogue. With the help of the group, participants can learn to name their world, understand and analyse their own situation. The source of knowledge is no longer 'out there' or elsewhere; rather it is in the knowledge of the self and the collective knowledge of the group. The individual and the collective are the experts.

This collective naming of reality has the potential to be the first step in the process of change. The limits and extent of this change depend on the group and its context.

Creating a safe space where respectful and creative dialogue can happen is not a simple task for the facilitator or for a group. Dialogue implies having the confidence to express views and opinions and, for some, this is a difficult task.

Some people who find themselves disregarded or who experience prejudice and inequality in their daily lives find it difficult to talk or give opinions in a group situation. Others find it difficult to listen and are intent on getting their ideas across. The effect of this can be to further silence those who lack the confidence to express their opinions. In this





context expressing opinions in a group can be intimidating.

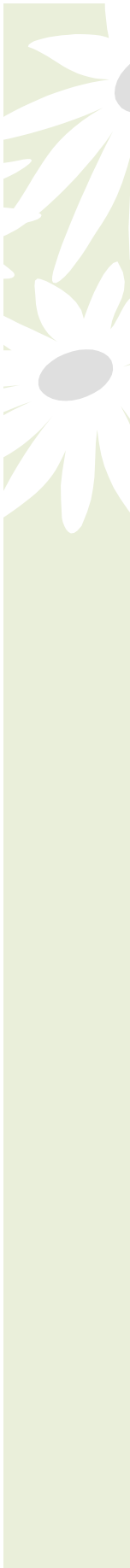
Those who every day experience being silenced, disregarded and dismissed if they state an opinion, need to experience the affirmation of being really heard and valued. This is core to the process of a powerful, radical, transformatory facilitation.

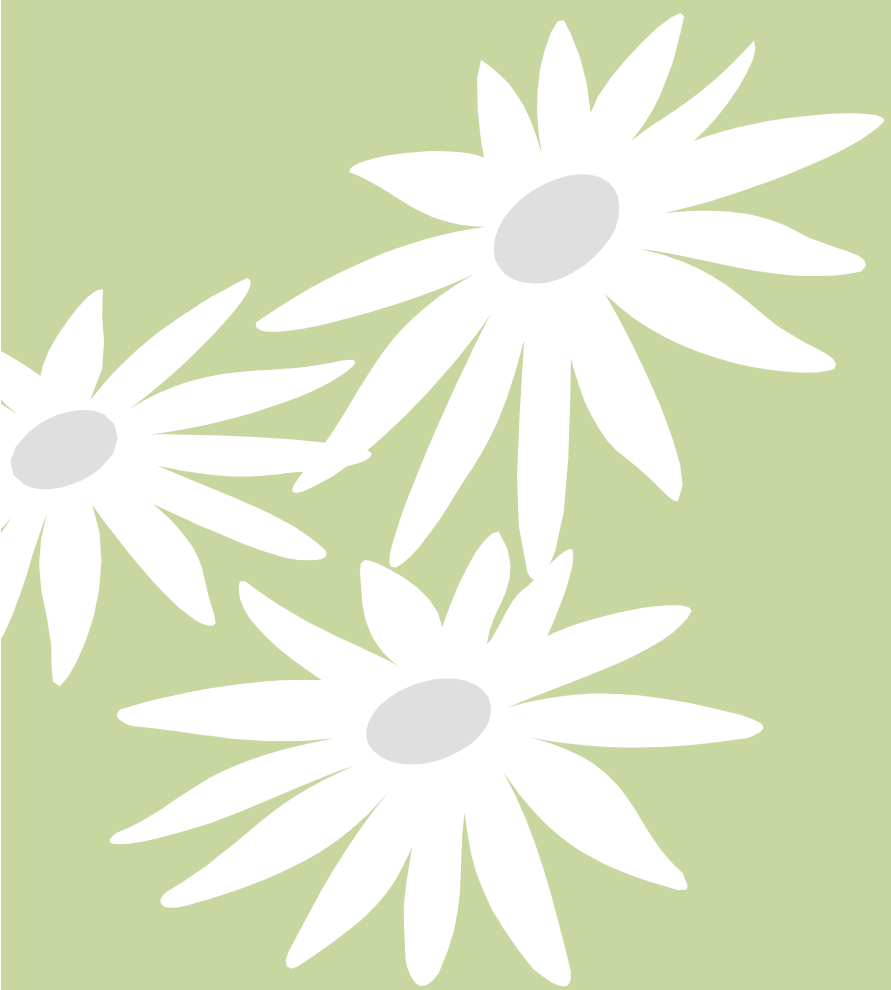


Spotlight on Practice

- Always spend time agreeing ground rules for participation with a group in the early stages of a session and regularly check to see if they are being 'lived' by the group. Make adjustments as needed.
- Encourage participants to speak for themselves, maintain confidentiality and value all contributions.
- 'Respect' is a term that comes up frequently when setting ground rules. Agreeing the meaning of this term can inform the group and boost the confidence of nervous participants.
- Initially small group discussion can be less intimidating. Taking away the pressure of speaking to the whole group is valuable for people who are new to this way of working.
- Working in groups of three rather than pairs can ease the pressure of one-to-one conversations.
- Adult education models recommend that groups sit in a circle. However, this can be very intimidating for some people. Think about using a table for the first few sessions with chairs around it. This provides a welcome and familiar security boundary for people when they are feeling nervous.
- If a participant is speaking for others or taking over, direct the conversation back to the group: "Would someone else like to comment about...?"
- Don't fall into the trap of speaking for the participants, for example, "I think what Mary is trying to say is..." Encourage participants themselves to clarify what they are saying or proposing.
- Be aware of your body language and the messages you might be giving to the group. Role model good listening posture: Keep eye contact; don't interrupt; and lean forward a little towards the speaker.

- Don't worry if there is silence in the group during or after discussion. People may be thinking, reflecting and getting their thoughts together. Don't rush in to fill the silence as this can stop the most powerful contributions from happening.





PART 2

WIDENING PARTICIPATION

In **Widening Participation**, we focus on literacy, learning styles and anti-racism work:

Literacy, because of the key role it plays in enabling or blocking full participation in groups, and in the wider society.

Learning styles, because an understanding of how people learn can help facilitators design programmes and sessions in a way that responds to the different learning styles of individuals.

Anti-racism, as it is a prevalent issue in modern Ireland.

Integrating literacy awareness into facilitation practice

Literacy is everyone's business. It is the concern of government, business, families, communities and individuals. It touches almost every aspect of our lives and plays a key role in the economic, affective, social, political and cultural well-being of every individual, community or society. Literacy unlocks the door to all forms of capital: economic, affective, social, political and cultural.

What is literacy?

"All good literacy work starts with the needs of the individual, known as the learner-centred approach. Literacy involves the integration of listening, speaking, reading, writing and numeracy. It also encompasses aspects of personal development – social, economic, emotional – and is concerned with improving self-esteem and building confidence. It goes far beyond mere technical skills of communication. The underlying aim of good literacy practice is to enable people to understand and reflect critically on their life circumstances with a view to exploring new possibilities and initiating constructive change¹¹."

Popular belief about illiteracy places the 'blame' for a lack of reading and writing skills at the door of individuals:

"She never learnt anything in school."

"He was always slow to learn."

However, high levels of adult illiteracy (500,000 Irish people or one in four of the population¹²) highlight economic, affective, cultural and political inequalities rooted in the education system and in the wider society.

Economic inequality and literacy

The links between poverty and illiteracy are widely accepted.

11 The National Adult Literacy Agency (2002), *Strategic Plan*, NALA

12 *International Adult Literacy Survey* (1998), OECD





Adults with unmet literacy needs are more likely to be unemployed, consistently poor, socially excluded and cumulatively marginalised.

People in society do not have equal opportunities to learn. Families with wealth can and do invest more in their children's education. Advantages such as extra-curricular activities, travel, private tuition, access to the creative arts as well as additional home supports such as use of computers and books, and even space, quiet and heat in the home, all give further advantage to the more affluent in society.

For adults, economic inequalities mean that those trapped in low-paid work cannot access further education. Women without transport and childcare costs are disadvantaged in accessing mainstream learning. People living in rural areas have unequal access to educational services.



Spotlight on the facilitator 1

How do you think that other aspects of inequality impact on adult literacy – Affective inequality / Social and Cultural inequality / Political inequality?



Spotlight on the facilitator 2

List the use you have made of literacy in the past 48 hours. What would be the implications for you if your literacy needs remained unmet?

Spotlight on the facilitator 3



Look at your practice with groups. How reliant are you on literacy – hand-outs, reading, writing and flip charts?

Can you think of alternative ways of working that might make it easier for people with unmet literacy needs to participate?



Spotlight on group work

Aim: To raise awareness of the different dimensions of equality in a literacy friendly-approach.

Give the group magazines, scissors, glue and four pieces of A3 card. Ask them to make four posters that illustrate the resource, cultural, political and affective factors that affect their lives.

When people have finished ask them to explain the images they have made. Invite others to comment.

- Is there one factor more important than another?
- If the group were in power, what changes would they make to ensure more equality in the different spheres?



Spotlight on practice

- Confidence is a key ingredient in learning. Low self-esteem is almost always an issue for people with unmet literacy needs. Exercises that draw from and acknowledge people's life

skills and experience can help to build the esteem of adults in groups.

- Do not assume that everyone in a group is comfortable reading aloud. Ask for a volunteer to read when necessary.
- Initially, when doing an exercise that requires recording notes, ask for volunteers to write.
- Use creative methodologies like painting, collage work, photography and role plays to explore issues.
- Be aware of your use of language and vocabulary. Think through what you are going to say and think of different ways of saying it. Check often if your meaning is clear.
- Name literacy as an issue early on with the group. Frame it in terms of a symptom of inequality in the system rather than a personal deficit.
- When working with smaller groups try to work around a table. Use large sheets of flip chart on the table to record points or decisions. Where possible represent decisions with images or symbols. Say aloud the decision or point as you draw the symbol. This is a useful way of recording points that draw on strength in visual memory.
- Print flip chart sheets in advance and avoid using a cursive style when recording notes on flip

charts during sessions. Keep your handwriting clear. Ask for help with spelling from the group, make it all right to make mistakes.

- Be prepared if someone comes to you looking for advice about literacy needs. Know where literacy provision is available locally.

Integrating anti-racist values into facilitation practice

Racism is recognised as a living force in the world today. We are not immune to it in Ireland. It did not arrive on our shores with refugees, asylum-seekers and migrant workers. Travellers intimately know how racist attitudes, actions and systems feel and how they affect their lives.

What is racism?

Racism is the belief that some people are inferior because they belong to a certain ethnic, racial or cultural group. This belief leads to attitudes of prejudice and actions of discrimination and oppression.

Why does it happen?

Racism is rooted in the belief that one group or identity is 'the norm' and somehow superior to others. Fundamentally this sense of superiority is rooted in the belief that being 'better' than others entitles a person to more rights, more wealth, more opportunities,





more status, power and privilege than others. Racism reinforces relationships of unequal power.

The lived reality of unequal power, combined with prejudice, enables some people to treat others in racist ways. This results in them being denied access to opportunities, resources and decision-making processes¹³.

Who experiences racism in Ireland?

- The Traveller community, based on their distinct culture and nomadic identity;
- Minority ethnic groups on the basis of their skin colour and their ethnicity;
- Refugees, asylum-seekers and migrant workers;

- Women from minority ethnic groups¹⁴.

Facilitators need to be aware of the influence racism can have on them, and on members of the groups with whom they work. The first step, as always, is to spend time on some self-reflection.

Spotlight on the facilitator / Spotlight on group work



Aim: To explore attitudes to racism.

Where do we get our attitudes?
What are the messages you absorbed about black people / white people in the following places?

Try the same exercise again for Travellers / Settled people.

	Home/ family	School	TV/film	Books Newspapers
Black people are:				
White people are:				

13 O'Connell, John (1998), *Travellers in Ireland*, Dublin: The National Co-ordinating Committee for the European Year Against Racism

14 *Guidelines on Anti-Racism and Intercultural Training*: Dublin: The National Consultative Committee on Racism and Interculturalism



This exercise can be used to analyse attitudinal beliefs about any groups – people with disability, people who are older, heterosexuals etc.

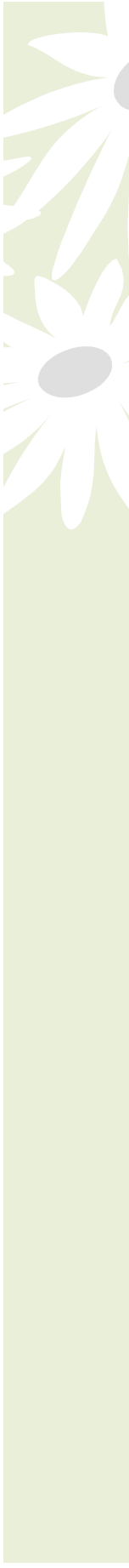
- What did you notice about your own attitudes and stereotypes?
- What did this reveal about the background assumptions that you may bring with you into groups with which you work?

Spotlight on group work

Exercise: Raising awareness of background assumptions.

- Distribute a blurred/hazy photograph to the group. The photograph can be of a group of people working together, a street scene or an 'interior shot' such as a family around a kitchen table.

Resource Equality	Affective Equality
Social and Cultural Equality	Political Equality





- Ask people to freely interpret what is happening in the picture.
- Compare the results.
- Use this to illustrate that we all have different sets of background assumptions that colour our perceptions. The more aware we are of these background assumptions the less likely they are to allow us to act in a prejudiced way.
- Be aware of the legal and policy framework that underpins the fight against racism.
- Consider participating in anti-racism training.
- Trust the group. It is likely that there is a pool of experience regarding discrimination within the group. Draw out this experience as a starting point for discussion and analysis of racism.
- Lift the focus of analysis from the personal experience to consideration of the economic, political, affective and social structures that support and enshrine discrimination.



Spotlight on the facilitator / Spotlight on group work

Aim: To understand how broadly racism affects individual and community lives.

How do people experience racism?

Using the Equality Framework on pages 13 and 29 ask yourself how people experience racism in respect of the four spheres of equality.

- What effect can this inequality have on individuals / on communities?
- Who benefits from this?
- Who loses out?
- What needs to change?
- Do not expect people from ethnic minorities to talk about their lives in a public space. This can be both intrusive and abusive for individuals. It is not their job to do our thinking.
- If there are members of ethnic minorities in the group beware of over-identifying with them. This can be patronising and can add an extra layer of oppression to people's experience.



Spotlight on practice

- Debunk the myths. Research the facts. Find out for yourself the entitlements of refugees and asylum-seekers¹⁵.
- Review the materials you use with groups. How can they reflect the diversity that exists in Ireland today?
- Promote and model an attitude of naming and welcoming

¹⁵ Useful website: www.nccri.ie

difference. Address people's fears of difference. Analyse with the group how they can benefit from difference.

- If a very strong point is being made by one member of the group don't feel you have to deal with it on your own. Reflect it back to the group and seek different views. This can help to counter aggressive, racist comments.

Depending on the group context and purpose, consider if it would be appropriate to do some inter-cultural work. Some of the contacts listed in the final part of this book will be helpful.

Taking learning styles into account in facilitation practice

Our own learning history will have a profound impact on any new learning situation we encounter.

For many people, school as a place of learning does not invoke happy memories. In this context returning to learning can be a difficult journey.

Because we are unique, we each think and learn differently. Much investigation has been carried out in recent decades to better understand how we learn. From this research, different and overlapping theories have emerged. The three main ones are:

- Left and right brain learning;

- Sensory learning;
- Multiple intelligence.

Left and right brain learning

As a result of advances in X-ray techniques, and study carried out on the brains of stroke victims, much more is known about the workings of the brain than ever before. Colour X-rays demonstrate the intricate workings of the brain. When a problem is posed to a person, an image of how the brain deals with it can be seen and this shows the hemisphere of the brain that is most commonly used for that task.

We know at present that the two hemispheres of the brain, the right and left, work in different ways. The right brain is concerned with emotion and creative activities, the left with more analytical thought processes. Each hemisphere is involved in all thinking. Some people favour one side over the other and are described as right brain or left brain thinkers. Others are equally adept in using both sides of the brain in any given situation.

The brain is like any muscle in our bodies – the more it is used and exercised the fitter and more effective it becomes¹⁶.

Sensory learning

This type of learning refers to auditory, visual and kinaesthetic learners.

¹⁶ Buzan, Tony (1991), *Use Both Sides of Your Brain*, USA: PenguinPlume
Buzan, Tony, Buzan, Barry (1996), *The Mind Map Book*, USA: PenguinPlume





- **Auditory learners** make up about 30 per cent of the population. They take in and process information through listening. They learn through discussion, talking things through and listening to other perspectives and points of view.
- **Visual learners** make up around 65 per cent of the population. They learn through seeing and can think in pictures. Visual learners easily understand the messages in images, diagrams, pictures, body language and facial expression.
- **Kinaesthetic learners** make up around 5 per cent of the population. They learn by acting, doing, moving around and touch. They favour a hands-on approach and will be the first in a group to start to move around in their seats!

All of us use these different styles of learning at different times and most of us have one preferred style that we are comfortable with.

Multiple Intelligence

Dr. Howard Gardner, an American psychologist, has developed a theory about intelligence and how we use it¹⁷. He has identified eight different but connected intelligences. In the past, intelligence relating to reading, writing and numerical skills were the most commonly valued

intelligences. As a result of Dr. Gardner's work a more holistic picture of intelligence emerges.

The eight intelligences he identifies are:

- **Verbal/linguistic**
These learners have a strong ability to use words and language well and to learn from words. They think in words rather than pictures.
- **Logical/mathematical**
These learners have the ability to solve problems in a logical way. They are skilled at understanding patterns and sequences and they like to ask many questions.
- **Musical**
Those who have musical strengths have the ability to produce and appreciate music. They are quick to recognise rhythms and to learn rhythmic sequences.
- **Bodily/kinaesthetic**
Kinaesthetic learners have the ability to learn through feel and touch. These learners like to express themselves through movement.
- **Visual and Spatial**
Some people have particular visual and spatial strengths. They often think in three dimensions. These learners think in pictures and images and consequently are quick to read and understand maps, charts and plans.

¹⁷ Gardner, Howard (1983,1999), *Frames of Mind, The Theory of Multiple Intelligences*, New York: Basic Books

- **Interpersonal Skills**
Some have a particular ability to work well and maintain good relationships with others. These learners are very empathetic and readily understand other people's point of view. They are skilled at both verbal and non-verbal communication and like to learn co-operatively in groups.
- **Intra-personal skills**
Some people's strength lies in their ability to reflect on and understand themselves. These learners are skilled at evaluation, reflection and analysis and like to apply these skills to learning.
- **Naturalistic intelligence**
Some people have special strength and ability to survive and to understand natural surroundings. These learners like learning that is pragmatic and grounded in real life contexts.

Although each one of us is naturally stronger in some areas than others, we can all develop strategies to improve upon the intelligences that we don't normally use.

The first step in this process is to identify for ourselves our own primary intelligences, that is, the ones we are most comfortable using. We can then focus on the least used intelligences and, if necessary, develop a strategy to strengthen them.

Knowing how we learn can be very empowering. It can help us to develop coping strategies to compensate for weaknesses and to capitalise on strengths. For facilitators, it can help pinpoint the diversity of approaches to take with groups so that all intelligences are activated in the process.

Spotlight on group work



Think of something you have learnt in your life – swimming, driving, a craft or a language maybe.

- How did you learn it?
- Why did you learn it? What motivated you?
- What helped you?
- What made it difficult?

What would you say is your preferred learning style?

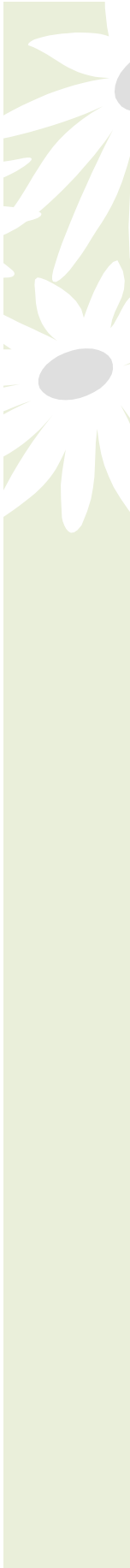
How does this affect you in practical ways in a group-learning situation?

Spotlight on Practice



- Discovering the preferred learning styles of participants will greatly enhance the learning experience for people and the group. Multiple intelligence quizzes can be useful for this¹⁸.
- Getting in touch with why people are learning will clarify their motivation. It is

18 www.ldpride.net/learningstyles.mi.htm





motivation that will help people to stay involved in any learning process.

- It is helpful at the outset of a session to identify with the group the purpose of the work. Agree in advance what is to be achieved. This will help participants to have more ownership of the learning.
- There will be many different learning styles in any one group. In practice it means that facilitators need to vary delivery styles as much as possible.
- Use visual aids, involve participants in active learning and creative methods such as collage, art work and role play.
- Encourage questions and discussion.
- Balance input and participation. Rely more on participation because learning by doing is often more effective.

Conclusion

This book has explored some of the theory and practice that will support facilitators who wish to have an anti-poverty focus in their work. Despite the continued rhetoric about Ireland's economic growth, many people and groups still experience the multiple effects of poverty across generations. This inequality becomes even more damaging and frustrating when set against a background of plenty.

Addressing the reality of poverty both in theory and practice has been discussed in some detail here. Dealing with these matters requires time to reflect on issues, with resources and guidance along the way. It is hoped that those who wish to actively combat poverty in their work will be able to get the necessary support to translate their aspirations and commitment into real action for change in Irish society.

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USEFUL CONTACTS

Aontas

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Ranelagh, Dublin 6
Tel: 01-406 8220/1 Fax: 01-406 8227
Email: mail@aontas.com
Web: www.aontas.com

Centre for Independent Living Dublin

Carmichael House,
Brunswick Street Nth, Dublin 7.
Tel: 01-873 0455 / 873 0986
Fax: 01-8730 998
Email: info@dublincil.org
Web: www.dublincil.org

Combat Poverty Agency

Bridgewater Centre,
Conyngham Road, Islandbridge,
Dublin 8
Tel: 01-670 6746 Fax: 01-670 6706
Email: info@cpa.ie
Web: www.combatpoverty.ie

Community Workers Co-operative (CWC)

Unit 4, 1st Floor, Tuam Road Retail
Centre, Tuam Road, Galway
Tel: 091-779 030 Fax: 091-779 033
Email: info@cwci.ie
Web: www.cwci.ie

DESSA (Disability Equality Specialist Support Agency)

Fumbally Court, Fumbally Lane,
Dublin 8.
Tel: 01-416 3548 Fax: 01-453 6861
Manager: Alice Griffin: Email:
agriffin@dessa.ie
Email: info@dessa.ie
Web: www.dessa.ie





Disability Federation of Ireland
Fumbally Court, Fumbally Lane,
Dublin 8
Tel: 01-454 7978 Fax: 01-454 7981
Email: info@disability-federation.ie
Web: www.disability-federation.ie

EAPN Ireland (European Anti-Poverty Network)
5 Gardiner Row, Dublin 1
Tel: 01-874 5737 Fax: 01-878 1289
Email: eapn@iol.ie
Web: www.eapn.ie

Focus Ireland
9-12 High Street, Dublin 8
Tel: 01-881 5900 Fax: 01-881 5950
Email: info@focusireland.ie
Web: www.focusireland.ie

Forum of People with Disabilities
1st Floor, 21 Hill Street, Dublin 1
Tel: 01-878 6077 Fax: 01-878 6170
Email: info@fpd.ie
Web: www.inforum.ie

GLEN (Gay and Lesbian Equality Network)
Tower One, Fumbally Court,
Fumbally Lane, Dublin 8, Ireland.
Tel: 01-473 0599 Fax: 01-473 0597
Email: admin@glen.ie
Web: www.glen.ie

ICON (Inner City Organisations Network)
22 Lower Buckingham Street,
Dublin 1.
Tel: 01-836 6890 Fax: 01-836 4870
Email: iconet@iol.ie

INOUE
Araby House, 8 North Richmond St,
Dublin 1
Tel: 01-856 0088 Fax: 01-856 0090
Email: info@inoue.ie
Web: www.inoue.ie

Irish Refugee Council
Dublin Office:
88 Capel Street, Dublin 1
Tel: 01-873 0042 Fax: 01-873 0088
Email: refugee@iol.ie
Web: www.irishrefugeecouncil.ie

Ennis Office:
1 Bank Place, Ennis, Co. Clare
Tel.: 065-682 2026
Fax: 065-682 2017
Email: irc.ennis@eircom.net
Web: www.irishrefugeecouncil.ie

Irish Traveller Movement
4/5 Eustace Street, Dublin 2.
Tel: 01-679 6577 Fax: 01-679 6578
Email: itmtrav@indigo.ie
Web: www.itmtrav.com

Meitheal
35 Exchequer Street, Dublin 2.
Tel: 01-671 9803 Fax: 01-671 9573
Email: info@meitheal.ie
Web: www.meitheal.ie

The National Adult Literacy Agency - NALA
76 Lower Gardiner Street, Dublin 1.
Tel: 01-855 4332 Fax: 01-855 5475
Email: literacy@nala.ie
Web: www.nala.ie

The National Consultative Committee on Racism and Interculturalism (NCCRI)

Third Floor, Jervis House,
Jervis Street, Dublin 1.
Tel: 01-478 5777 Fax: 01-872 7621
Email: info@nccri.ie
Web: www.nccri.com

The National Womens' Council of Ireland

9 Marlborough Court,
Marlborough Street, Dublin 1
Tel: 01-878 7248 Fax: 01-878 7301
Email: admin@nwci.ie
Web: www.nwci.ie

Older Women's Network - OWN

Senior House, All Hallows College,
Grace Park Rd, Dublin 9.
Tel: 01-884 4536 Fax: 01-884 4534
Email: ownireland@eircom.ie
Web: www.ownireland.net

One Family

Cherish House,
2 Lower Pembroke Street, Dublin 2.
Tel: 01-662 9212 Fax: 01-662 9096
Lo-Call Information Line:
1890 66 22 12
Email: info@onefamily.ie
Web: www.onefamily.ie

OPEN (One Parent Exchange and Network)

Unit 19, Greendale Centre,
Kilbarrack, Dublin 5
Tel: 01-832 0264 Fax: 01-832 0737
Email: enquiries@oneparent.ie
Web: www.oneparent.ie

Outhouse (Gay Lesbian Bisexual Transgender Resource Centre)

105 Capel Street, Dublin 1.
Tel: 01-873 4932 Fax: 01-865 0090
Email: info@outhouse.ie
Web: www.outhouse.ie

Pavee Point

46 North Great Charles Street,
Dublin 1
Tel: 01-878 0255 Fax: 01-874 2626
Email: pavee@iol.ie
Web: www.paveepoint.ie

Women's Aid

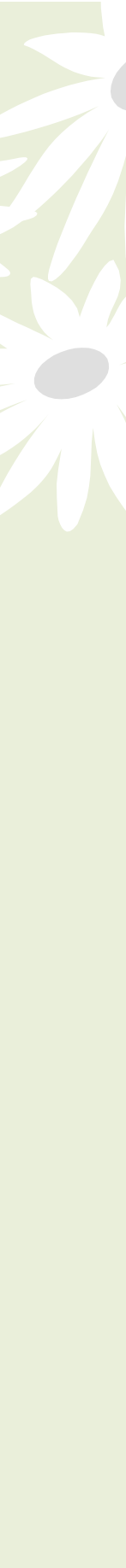
Everton House, 47 Old Cabra Road,
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Email: info@womensaid.ie
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