

Personal Preparation for Facilitators of Equality Courses

Facilitation involves following facilitator notes to fulfill group exercises, teach new information, and build solidarity within the class. Facilitating equality workshops and courses, however, includes an added factor.

For example, a basic stewards' course would teach you the process of properly filing a grievance. This process is relatively generic to every steward, although there can be small variations from local to local. Equality courses however, are not generic. Regardless of the exercises and information, equality courses are designed to address identity and power.

For instance, say that I am a white male heterosexual activist. How different is it for a racialized male gay activist to do the things that are "normal" for me? Equality workshops cover topics such as race, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, ability/disability, etc., and common to all these issues are tensions over the differences of identity and power. These tensions will appear in workshops, and facilitator skill involves dealing with the subject matter and the group dynamic of the class.

Here is a good way for a facilitator to prepare for equality courses:

1. Imagine the equality workshop you will be facilitating. Think of some of the potentially difficult issues you might have to deal with from the class. What issues can you list? Focus on one of the issues.
2. Imagine yourself as one participant in the class about to address this one difficult issue. Imagine another participant in the class who has a different viewpoint to yours about to address this same issue.
3. Imagine yourself speaking about this issue without interruption. Imagine the other participant speaking about this issue without interruption.
4. While each imaginary person is commenting on their own point of view, listen attentively to both people.
5. After listening to both people, ask yourself, "What are the basic points each one is trying to make?"
6. Now ask yourself:
 - a. "How do the two sides both represent issues *I personally have been thinking about?*"
 - b. "How do the two sides represent different aspects of what *people in the class might be honestly thinking?*"

c. “How do I facilitate different points of view *and* promote equality?”

We often speak about “human rights.” We think of these rights affecting neatly bundled groups of people under the labels of “protected grounds” in legislation. But an individual person, and, groups of individuals, are the prime element around which legislation revolves. In other words, human beings demand and deserve human rights.

Doing the exercise above develops your compassion as one human being. It also helps develop facilitation questions that humanize collective discussions in workshops.

(Questions adapted from: Mindell, A. (2002). *The deep democracy of open forums: practical steps to conflict prevention and resolution for the family, workplace, and world*. Charlottesville, VA: Hampton Roads, p.33.)