



Facilitating Dialogue In Your Student Group

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Adult education programs nurture student groups for a variety of reasons. Some are purely social while others have the goal of improving English conversation skills. There are student groups that function like support groups for students who are vulnerable and need encouragement to realize their dreams. Still, other student groups are governmental in nature and are similar to school alumni associations or student councils. All of these student groups share the dynamic of communication exchange between the participants that is otherwise known as “dialogue.” The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines dialogue as “a conversation carried on between two or more persons; a colloquy, talk together.”

Planning: Dialogue is the primary conduit for connecting students in a supportive dynamic that facilitates progress towards achieving their adult education goals. Effective dialogue is dependent upon strong facilitation leadership. This is achieved primarily through framing and asking dialogue questions. The following chart was developed by the International Association of Facilitators (IAF) and can be found in [The IAF Handbook of Group Facilitation](#) (p.216-218). This chart can be a helpful tool for facilitation planning.

Framing and Asking Dialogue Questions

Effective Techniques	Ineffective Techniques
<input type="radio"/> Prepare and write out your questions.	<input type="radio"/> Trust fate, and fly by the seat of your pants.
<input type="radio"/> Know your identity and act with integrity to cultivate a “capacity for connectedness” (The Courage To Teach by P. Palmer, 1998)	<input type="radio"/> Pretend to be someone you are not to gain group approval or advantage or to preordain a dialogue result.
<input type="radio"/> Ask questions.	<input type="radio"/> Make statements; present solutions or offer advice (“Why don’t you...or My brother had this situation once before, and he...)
<input type="radio"/> Who is in your group? Seek to invite participation. Prepare stimulating questions that people can relate to, are important and relevant to group, and attract their attention.	<input type="radio"/> Ask safe questions—those for which you know the expected response.

Professional Development Tools

Facilitating Student Groups In Your Adult Basic Education Program

Effective Techniques	Ineffective Techniques
<input type="radio"/> Be brief with your question.	<input type="radio"/> Ask compound questions with multiple subparts and choices.
<input type="radio"/> Use exploratory questions that call for discussion.	<input type="radio"/> Use rhetorical questions that require no answer.
<input type="radio"/> Deliver questions in a tone that invites contributions.	<input type="radio"/> Mandate that participants respond. Select a person to speak.
<input type="radio"/> Customize questions that reveal motivations for points of view and perspectives.	<input type="radio"/> Pose questions that might degrade, threaten, or marginalize participants to create controversy.
<input type="radio"/> Craft questions to reveal information, feelings and interests, opinions, and personal experiences and insight.	<input type="radio"/> Ask assumptive questions (a form of leading question) where the question assumes a fact ("How much will taxes go up next year?").
<input type="radio"/> Ask open-ended questions that allow a wide range of possible responses.	<input type="radio"/> Ask closed-ended questions (usually answered with a yes or no), and interrupt the flow or end the conversation.
<input type="radio"/> Use questions beginning with "what" and "how".	<input type="radio"/> Avoid questions that start with "Why do you..." as these will elicit a self-judgment or generate an "I don't know" response.
<input type="radio"/> Challenge assumptions and views not yet considered by the group.	<input type="radio"/> Maintain the status quo, and avoid asking the question that needs to be posed and answered.
<input type="radio"/> Listen before asking questions.	<input type="radio"/> Substitute your judgment before hearing the entire response.
<input type="radio"/> Be spontaneous (i.e. flexible).	<input type="radio"/> Engineer every moment for the dialogue, and do not deviate from the plan.
<input type="radio"/> Stay calm, and defuse contentious situations.	<input type="radio"/> Respond with anger, sarcasm, and strong-arm tactics to control group behaviors.

Evaluation: An important component of effective group facilitation is self-evaluation. This list would be helpful to use in that process. You may want to use this to stimulate an evaluative dialogue with co-workers to help continuously improve your facilitation skills.