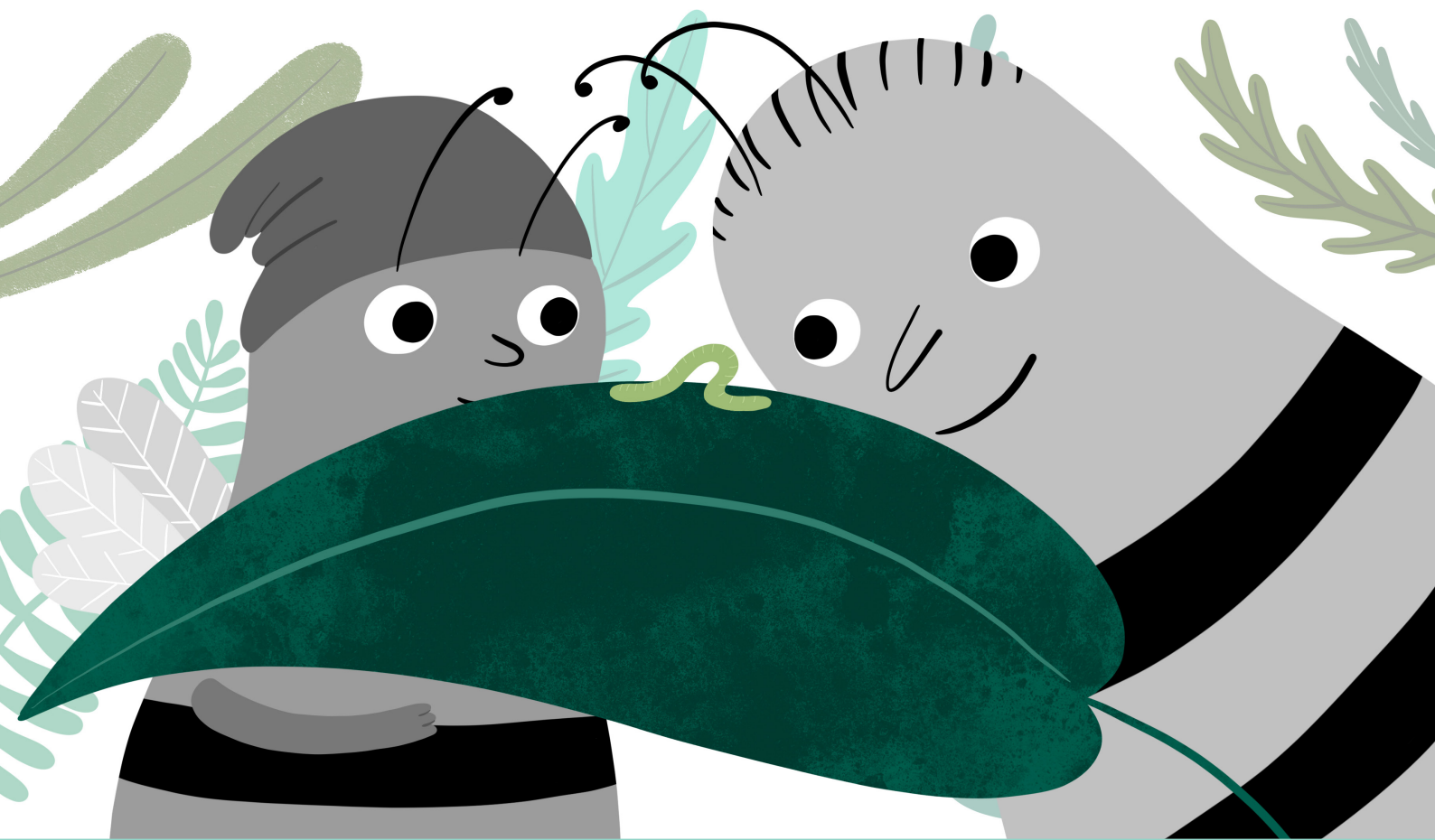


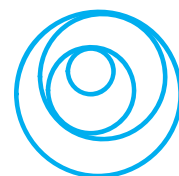
A short guide to

Facilitating learning



BOLD

POSITIVE
NEGATIVES



Lifeworlds
Learning

What is this?

Facilitation is not just another word for teaching. It is a related, but quite different approach to learning and teaching. This short guide to facilitating learning might be useful if you are not familiar with the idea or principles of facilitation. For those who are, it may prove a useful refresher or reminder.

A facilitation approach is particularly relevant where activities, discussions and subject matter might be considered controversial, uncertain, or involve many different perspectives. This is true of many issues that children and young people engage with as they grow up in an increasingly complex world.

In an era dominated by headlines about climate change, biodiversity loss and habitat destruction, our relationship and connection with nature is an example of such an issue. This forms the focus of the animation *Learning to Thrive* for which this guide has been produced.

The ideas we share here are designed to support adults to engage young people, and perhaps each other also, with the issues raised in the animation and the ways in which it relates to their own lives, experiences, hopes and concerns. You do not need to be a teacher or educationalist to use these ideas, but if you are then you might use them to reflect on your current practice.

Why facilitation and not teaching?

Most young people spend a significant amount of time being taught within education systems that simplify and compartmentalise the ways in which they experience and understand the world around them. This is not always compatible with the lived experiences of young people growing up with seemingly uncertain, complex and fragile futures. This disconnect can leave young people feeling confused, isolated, or even betrayed by the systems and people they relate with.

In these situations, teaching is unlikely to be an effective or meaningful approach to engage young people - it is simply more of the same! Facilitation offers a different approach and is rooted in an understanding of learning as a social and emotional process with multiple ways of knowing, sensing and responding.

This sort of learning takes place beyond (as well as within) formal learning spaces such as classrooms or planned lessons. It is often a sub-conscious process whereby values, attitudes and resulting behaviours are absorbed through our social and cultural relationships with family, peers, and the media for example.

Facilitation actively engages with the emotions, experiences and memories (personal biographies or lifeworlds) that we bring to any learning encounter. It also opens up spaces for us to safely question and perhaps re-imagine our lifeworlds as we experience different ideas and emotional responses within a social learning space.

Facilitation uses a set of approaches that should be consciously considered and practised over time. On the following page are cards showing six areas of facilitation. These can be used as prompts for thinking and reflection. Facilitation is an emergent process that will be influenced by the facilitator, the participants, the issue, and the learning environment. Use the cards to think about your own practice and approach to learning. What are you already doing? What new ideas might you consider?

Six aspects of facilitation: think about...

...participation

Are (all) learners freely able to participate?

Is the learning environment/culture a safe one?

Are learners able to co-shape and co-lead learning for themselves and for others?

Where is the power in the learning relationships?

...voice

Whose voices are being heard?

Are some voices too loud and how might we turn them down without silencing them?

Are there other voices that are silenced or not given space to be heard?

How might we allow voice for those who do not want to (or cannot) speak?

...sensitivity

How are the full range of learners' emotions respected, acknowledged and supported?

Are we sensitive to our own emotions and our choices for managing those?

What will we do if there are those who indicate they are feeling uncomfortable?

...openness

Are learners free to express their thinking?

How do we support robust engagement whilst minimising the chance of harm?

How might we enable learners to alert us to any harm they experience?

Are we aware of our legal duties and safeguarding responsibilities?

...compassion

How can we encourage concern and compassion around perspectives and issues, whilst still allowing a full range of expressions to co-exist?

How do we develop empathy, but not allow it to prevent difficult conversations?

...critical thinking

How can we support learners to respectfully challenge and deepen each others' ideas?

What is our role in pushing learners to be more critical?

How do we manage any discomfort that going into new areas of thinking might involve?

Top tips for effective facilitation

Facilitators tend to 'discover their own style' through experience and each would probably give you their own advice about how best to be a facilitator. We have filtered many conversations about facilitation and produced some top tips to keep in mind for facilitating learning:

A good facilitator...

- ... supports, enables and empowers students to lead their own learning;
- ... learns how to 'hold the space' to allow peer to peer learning - sometimes referred to as being 'the guide on the side', rather than 'sage on the stage';
- ... is able to safely challenge, offer alternatives and refocus groups;
- ... helps groups to engage with stimuli and activities, and to use these to share, challenge, build and reflect on their learning;
- ... demonstrates through their engagement (e.g. checking, clarifying, summarising, connecting) that participants' ideas and contributions are valued;
- ... knows that their greatest influence is over the direction of learning (the journey) and not the outcome (the destination);
- ... is aware of 'the power in the room' (including their own) and how to manage this appropriately;
- ... is able to 'suffer the silence' and allow time and space for thinking;
- ... can help learners be 'comfortable with being uncomfortable' and to reach into new spaces for their own and others' learning;
- ... understands that healthy disagreement is often more powerful than a false consensus (which tends to be determined by the most powerful);
- ... will ensure and maintain a 'safe space' for learning as an essential requirement.

adapted from facilitation course notes, Rob Bowden and Rosie Wilson (Lifeworlds Learning), 2019.

A note for educators

Normal safeguarding protocols and procedures apply during all learning sessions, including those facilitated rather than taught. Sometimes more open discussion sessions invite disclosures and in these cases safeguarding policies must be followed.

In extreme circumstances it may be necessary to consider withdrawing learners or to adapt, postpone or terminate the session for the wellbeing or safety of all learners.