

SHEP Facilitation Approach

The slide features a dark teal background. At the bottom, there are several overlapping, wavy, light teal and white shapes that create a sense of movement and depth.



Group Facilitation: Our Primary Strategy for Social Justice

SHEP recognises the social and economic inequity that shapes people's experiences and that gives great power and privilege to some individuals and groups while largely disempowering others. SHEP works in solidarity and partnership with others who are seeking to promote a just society and it does so especially through **facilitated groupwork**.

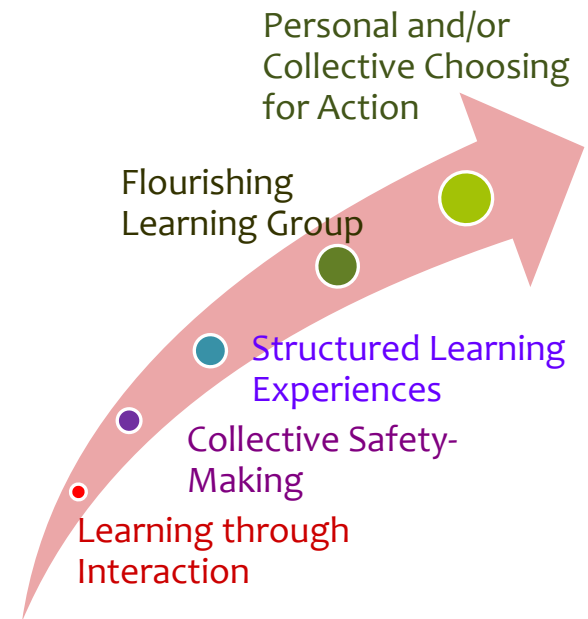
Our commitment in facilitation is unequivocally to justice, fairness and personal and collective empowerment.

FOR LEARNING AND FOR ACTION

SHEP offers a wide range of courses and workshops. Though some may put the emphasis on learning and others look more to possible action, all really involve shared learning and invite constructive action and change.

Facilitators work with participants to build a learning community in which learning comes through group interaction. The intention is to develop a climate of energy, safety and well-held boundaries in which even intense experiences that arise from the challenges of change can be held in the group. The facilitator contributes to the maintenance of the group and the deepening of its effectiveness by introducing discussion topics and structured learning experiences that can help the group to go safely to deeper levels of learning, awareness, group cohesion and choosing for action.

What emerges is a flourishing learning community that can give rise to fruitful personal and social change.



RESPECTFUL FACILITATION IN THE CONTEXT OF SHEP'S MISSION: A CREATIVE DIALOGUE

SHEP brings to its work a broad vision of a world that is socially just and ecologically sustainable. But it also believes that good facilitation must meet people where they are in their lives, with their own diverse and unique perspectives. This is the just starting point for connecting with people.

By embracing diversity and uniqueness, an opportunity for creative dialogue emerges where awareness and vision can expand. Facilitators may contribute to such dialogue by embodying SHEP's broad vision in their interactions with people. The structure of courses or workshops may also contribute by giving people opportunities, if they wish, to become more aware of how they are involved in communities at various levels and in the whole web of life. In addition, the overall range of courses and workshops that SHEP offers provides pathways to a fuller vision of flourishing.



SHEP's Approach to Group Facilitation

SHEP has evolved a general approach to facilitation over the years. Although such an approach needs to be experienced to be understood properly, the six words or phrases in the outer circles offer gateways into key aspects of it.

A short explanation of each can be got by clicking on the appropriate circle.



EMPOWERING GROUPWORK

Facilitation allows the experiences in and of a group to be a key source of learning.

A primary aim of facilitators is to work with the participants to **co-create a fruitful community of learning**. Participants learn through interacting with each other and being present to each other as they struggle with growth and change. Each person in the group is seen as an active agent in their own and others' learning. All are learners and all are sources of wisdom, and all contribute to **co-creating safety** in the group, and to maintaining well held boundaries, both within the group, and within the framework of SHEP as a whole.

When this is achieved, the interactions in the group become the most important learning resource, and facilitators can be less central to the learning. They still, of course, have a vital role in helping the group to maintain its effectiveness and purpose, both by direct interventions and by proposing suitable group exercises or learning structures that give participants new material to reflect on. And they have an important role in co-maintaining safety in the group, providing an anchor when the group is struggling, and an insightful presence that serves the journey of the group.



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EXPERIENTIAL

Facilitation helps people learn by attending to their experiences.

SHEP sees facilitation as grounded in real **respect** for **diversity** and for the **dignity** and **uniqueness** of each person. Each has their own life experience, their own strengths and difficulties, and their own unique path to growth and development. They can learn and change when they reflect on their current and past experience and become more **aware** of aspects of it that they had not noticed before.

Facilitators can help bring participants' attention to particular **aspects of their experience**, either by interacting directly with them, or by using learning structures that generate various kinds of experience. The particular aspects of experience to be focussed on will depend on the nature and purpose of the group. They include assumptions and ways of thinking and feeling about themselves or others, their ways of relating and communicating with family, friends or colleagues, their ways of relating to society or to the natural world, and so on.

The **depth of awareness** to be aimed at in facilitation will depend on the nature and purpose of the group, the explicit or implicit contract with the participants, and the wisdom and judgement of the facilitator as to what is most appropriate and life-enhancing for a particular group of participants.



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AUTHENTICALLY PRESENT

Facilitation is based on being really present to others and to self.

If people in a group are to feel safe enough to learn and change they need to feel the facilitator is **really present** to them, able to see and understand and accept them for who they are. Such **presence to others** calls for a capacity to feel one's way into the other person's experience and to respond with empathy and acceptance and compassion and love.

To be able to be present to others in that way facilitators need a capacity to be **present to themselves**. They need to be able to monitor what is happening in themselves as they relate to others, what they are thinking and feeling, how their body is reacting, what impulses are arising, and so on.

The capacity to be present both to oneself and to others, is something that needs to be developed over time. Central to SHEP's ethos is a conviction that facilitators should have undertaken **a journey of self-exploration** in which they get to know themselves in their complexity through exploring their feelings, their assumptions, their prejudices, their values, their ways of being in the world, their ways of relating, and so on.

Because the journey to self-knowledge is never complete, **humility** and **fallibility** are essential. There seems to be always more to be known and even the very notion of the self may change in the course of the journey. Along the way, **self-compassion** and **nurturing of the spirit** are also needed. SHEP seeks to support this journey by helping its practitioners build communities of shared understanding and commitment.



**UNLESS YOU LEARN TO FACE
YOUR OWN SHADOWS,
YOU WILL CONTINUE TO SEE
THEM IN OTHERS**

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SKILLED

Facilitators need skills of various kinds.

It helps facilitators to have a natural ease of communication, to be spontaneously warm and kind, to have a wide range of life experiences, and to have an evident enthusiasm and passion about what they are doing. But they also need to have developed a wide range of **facilitation skills**, including skills in helping awareness, in fostering good communication, and in maintaining the safety and effectiveness of the group.

Facilitators also need a wide range of skills in **designing** courses and workshops suitable for the particular kind of group they are facilitating. Such skills include, among many others, clarifying the purpose of the course and choosing themes and experiences that may help learning while maintaining safety.

They will normally also need **presentation or teaching skills**. Communicating ideas and information can sometimes be an important support to the work of a group. This is often done informally but sometimes more structured inputs on specific topics or theories may be essential. For this, facilitators will need to ensure they have a reasonable mastery of the topic, decide what they want to communicate, and find a way to present it effectively.

Not every facilitator will be strong in all these skills, so it is helpful if **co-facilitators** bring different skills that complement each other. When the cultural background or the life experiences of group members is a relevant consideration, the culture and life experience of one or both facilitators may also be an important asset.



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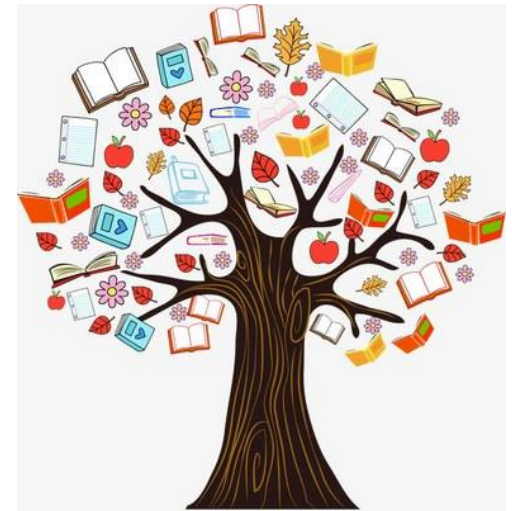
INFORMED

Facilitators need some general theoretic understanding of human development and its impacts, as well as of the specific issues the group is dealing with.

Facilitators need some familiarity with **theoretic perspectives** that can illuminate aspects of people's life experiences that might otherwise be missed. It is essential in all groups that facilitators have an understanding of the lasting effects of trauma . They also need a psychological and sociological understanding of the way the gender, social, economic, political and cultural structures within which people live not only shape their outer experiences and life opportunities but also reach into their inner lives, shaping their ideas and assumptions and their ways of seeing themselves and their world.

Facilitators who are working with groups on specialised topics, such as stress management or health-related issues, will need deeper relevant knowledge of these issues. Likewise, facilitators working with learning-oriented or action-oriented groups in organisations or in communities, will need additional relevant knowledge of such things as group and organisational dynamics, community development principles, and so on.

SHEP believes that underpinning personal awareness with more general theoretic understanding is important both for facilitators' own self-knowledge and for their ability to enable others to know themselves.



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COMMITTED

Facilitators try to live SHEP's values

As is clear from its mission and value statements, SHEP is strongly committed to furthering personal and community empowerment and liberation, and to action for social justice, climate justice and the protection of the web of life. It wants its facilitators to **embody** these values in their work with people and groups, and even to have the kind of passionate commitment to them that can inspire and encourage positive transformation in others.

At the same time it asks them to balance their commitment to promoting change with an absolute respect for the right of people to have their own views and to change at their own pace or not to change at all. This is not always an easy balance to achieve.

Embodying in facilitation work the kind of values that SHEP is committed to is not likely to be effective unless the facilitators believe in those values and are trying to live by them. So SHEP asks its facilitators to work towards achieving that kind of **congruence**. However, this is accompanied by a recognition of the humanness and fallibility of facilitators as well as everyone else, and a recognition that the journey to fuller growth is an unending one. As with parenting, “good enough” is already high achievement!



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