

# Formation of Freirian Facilitators

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## INTRODUCTION

This paper is written for persons who are interested in putting together a formation program for adult education facilitators, using the ideas of Paulo Freire. The thoughts expressed here assume that the reader is a person whose responsibility is making the formation program happen (usually an administrator type - somebody who's in a position to pull strings to get the funds and manoeuvre time schedules and find the substitutes and order the coffee and rolls) or a person who will be chosen to coordinate the formation experiences - the facilitator's facilitator.

A prerequisite for thinking about the formation of facilitators is an understanding of the ideas behind liberatory education. This paper will be helpful if the reader already has a familiarity with the philosophy and methodology of Paulo Freire. If you're not sure about what that is, then I would recommend that you first get yourself a copy of Cynthia Brown's book *Literacy in 30 Hours*, which explains the method Freire used in literacy education in Northeast Brazil. Also read the first part of *Education for a Critical Consciousness*, which Freire wrote himself, explaining his method very clearly, step-by-step. And read at least Chapter Two of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, in which Freire talks about the difference between traditional education, which he calls "banking," and learning through a dialogue between equals.

I would also recommend, before thinking seriously about the question of facilitator formation, getting some first-hand acquaintance with a liberatory education program. Participate in some of the sessions, talk with people, ask a lot of questions. Find out about the connection between education and empowerment.

What is "empowerment" anyway? What do people mean when they talk about conscientisation? Is it just analytical reflection and consciousness-raising, or is it also about action, about transforming society? How do you connect action with education? How do you organize for action without manipulating people? Are schools and adult education centers the best places for this kind of education to take place? Ponder over these things and dialogue with people who've been involved as educators and as learners in liberatory education programs.

There are a number of liberatory education projects in this country. Many of those projects which work with Hispanic adults participate in the Educacion Liberadora Network (which does

not limit itself to Hispanic projects). Networking activities have been coordinated by the Latino Institute, which has housed a resource center called IRCEL (Information and Resource Center for Educacion Liberadora) and published a bi-monthly newsletter. After January 31, 1983, all these activities will be assumed by Alternative Solutions Inc. of Reston, Virginia.

The 28 projects participating in the network are diverse. Some serve migrant workers in rural areas; others are located in the barrios of the bin cities from New York to San Antonio to San Juan. Some are small projects using one or two rooms; others are huge with hundreds of participants. Some are new and just getting organized; others have been in operation for over ten years. Facilitators in some projects have a high level of formal schooling; some are experienced educators with a thorough understanding of Freire's ideas; and some are workers in the factories and fields of this country, new facilitators who were learners in a project just a few months ago.

What all these projects have in common is the commitment to empowerment of the oppressed.

Some projects have developed formation programs to prepare facilitators for their work in liberatory education. Others have no formal program for formation - in these situations, facilitators learn what they can through informal dialogues with their co-workers. This paper was written primarily for the several projects which have indicated that they could use help in the area of facilitator formation.

It is not a "training manual." First of all, the word "training" is not used here because it connotes a kind of regimentation, a following through, step-by-step, in a pre-determined process. "Training" seems incompatible with the idea of learning through dialogue. The word "formation" lends itself more comfortably to the idea of growth in an open and human interaction.

Secondly, it's not a "manual." This little work will not serve as a handbook to tell you what to do on the first day of facilitator formation, and what to do on the second. It does not contain ready-made exercises that you can follow in your program.

Is that a disappointment? If you were expecting concrete exercises in a "How To Do It Manual," then you may feel short-changed by what you get here. That's very understandable. But stick with it.

Liberatory education involves the idea of "re-inventing." "A genuine dialogue between people exchanging ideas has to be a new dialogue each time. A good program of facilitator formation can't be pre-fabricated in one place and then copied in all the other places. It has to be re-invented all over again in each setting. And in each place, each time, it will be invented somewhat differently. "En verdad, las experiencias no se transplantan, sino que se reinventan," says Freire in his book, Cartas a Guinea-Bissau, Apuntes de una experiencia pedagogica en proceso (Pedagogy in Process: Letters to Guinea-Bissau).

What follows here is a collection of thoughts, of things to consider, when organizing a facilitator formation program. Most of it can be summed up by saying three things:

1. Formation experiences to prepare Freirian facilitators should be consistent with Freire's pedagogy.
2. It takes a long time; it's not something that can be finished and complete after a 3-day seminar. In truth, experiences are not transplanted, but are re-invented. English translations will be provided throughout the text as footnotes.
3. Liberatory education is political; its ultimate end is action to transform society. Formation of facilitators shouldn't stop (and perhaps doesn't begin) with the acquisition of skills in a participatory approach to adult education. Questions about WHY we are doing this need to be addressed, as well as questions about the consequences of our work.

A final note about semantics. Freire doesn't like the word "facilitator." I just found that out at a conference in New York in June. Here is what I heard him say:

"I don't like this word ' facilitator' which you created here in this country. It was created not to unveil but to obscure. Sounds to me, seems to me, as if I were ashamed to be an educator, pretending not to be what I am. (Freire, "Educating the Educator" Conference, New York, June 30, 1982.)

Now what do we do about that? I see his point, and I think he's right, but I'm stuck with the word after all these years of using it and calling myself one. So, educators, here begin some thoughts on the formation of Freirian "facilitators. "

## SELECTING THE PARTICIPANTS IN FACILITATOR FORMATION

### A. Selection of Facilitators

Who are the facilitators in a project? How are they chosen? On what basis should the selection be made? Are there characteristics of good facilitators that can be identified before participation in formative experiences?

Freire himself mentions a few characteristics. First of all, he says the facilitator must have faith in people, faith in their ability to create, to change things. You have to love, he says, and you have to be convinced that education should be for liberation, not for domestication. He also says that the facilitator must be humble.

Para que usted pueda ser un buen Coordinador de Circulo de Cultura necesita, antes de todo, tener fe en el hombre. Creer en su posibilidad de crear, de cambiar las cosas. Usted precisa amar. Necesita estar convencido de que el esfuerzo fundamental de la promocion como de la edacion, es la liberacion del hombre, nunca su 'domesticacion' . . .

De ahi que usted, Coordinador de un Circulo, tenga que ser humilde, para que pueda promoverse con el grupo, en lugar de perder la humildad y pretender promover al grupo, una vez que se juzga 'promovido.' (Freire; Una pedagogia para el adulto, S. Sanchez, pp. 57.)

In order for you to be a good Coordinator of a Circle of Culture, you need too have faith in the person. To believe in his or her possibility to create, to change things. You must love. You need to be convinced that the fundamental strength of education is the liberation of the person, never his "domestication"...

For this reason, you, the Coordinator of a Circle, must be humble, so that you can progress with the group, instead of losing your humility pretending that it is you who makes the group move ahead because you have already advanced.

How important is it for facilitators to share the characteristics and realities of the learners? Freire is skeptical of middle-class facilitators working with peasants or workers, because of their ideological conditioning, their assimilation of the myths of superiority. Can a facilitator with a middle-class background and education be effective and liberating? Should such a person get involved in this business at all? Probably not, unless that person has identified himself or herself as one of the oppressed, achieving something which Freire calls "class suicide."

Some of the best experiments I have seen were those in Chile where we had as educators, young Chilean peasants who, when they were trained, revealed indisputable efficiency... They were a group of young people who were not dreaming of how they might become urbanized. Their dreams were fully identified with those of their own communities...

If it were not possible either to count on peasants who can be rapidly trained for literacy work, as in Chile, nor on urban youths capable of committing "class suicide" and of 'knowing how to become integrated into their country and with their people; then I would rather dedicate the necessarily longer time to train peasants who might become authentic educators of their comrades, than to use middle-class youth. The latter may be trained more rapidly but their commitment is less trustworthy. (Pedagogy in Process: Letters to Guinea-Bissau, p. 82.)

The good potential facilitator, then, is a person who has identified with the oppressed. He or she is a humble being who believes that every person is capable of creating, capable of changing things. The good facilitator also has a genuine and profound respect for the dignity of other individuals and has a willingness and ability to really listen. This person is strong enough and nature enough not to be defensive in the face of an honest critique.

These characteristics are deeply ingrained; they are not likely to be acquired in the space of a formation workshop. It probably means that not every enthusiastic applicant will make a good facilitator. There are some who, because of their political ideology or for other reasons, cannot be considered appropriate candidates for work in liberating education.

In transforming the educational system inherited from the colonizers, one of the necessary tasks is the training of new groups of teachers and the retraining of old ones. Among these teachers, and especially among those who have taught before, there will always be those who perceive themselves to be “captured” by the old ideology and who will consciously continue to embrace it; they will fall into the practice of undermining, either in a hidden or an open way, the new practice. From such persons one cannot hope for any positive action toward the reconstruction of society. But there will be others who, also perceiving themselves to be captive to the old ideology, will nonetheless attempt to free themselves from it through the new practice to which they will adhere. It is possible to work with these persons. They are the ones who “commit class suicide.” The others refuse to do so. (Letters to Guinea-Bissau, p.15).

It is important for each project to think about the specific characteristics they want to identify in prospective facilitators. It is only natural that the priority given to different characteristics will vary from project to project, as the communities and their needs are also different. The point is, time should be set aside to consider these characteristics before interviewing any applicants. Solidaridad Humana in New York City has developed a checklist of characteristics and competencies they look for among candidates in their project. Colegio de la Tierra in California has identified 16 beliefs and traits that they feel are prerequisites to being effective as a Community Educator in their program. The Ecuador Project, an endeavor of the University of Massachusetts in the mid-1970s, produced long lists of facilitator characteristics to be identified before and after the training process.

A liberating education project in the Washington D.C. area, Project C.L.U.B. (Critical Literacy for Urban Blacks), has been giving long and careful thought to the matter of facilitator selection. They are concerned about three aspects of a person:

1. Personal background, skills, activities, education
2. Views of Education - opinions about schools and learning
3. Social Vision - the broad overview

In considering facilitator candidates, they will be focusing on seven specific things:

- How people talk about themselves - their self-concept
- How people perceive the world - e.g., changing, static.
- How people assess their skills and experiences - have they been of value, or a waste? Analytical capabilities - how perceptive are they?
- Willingness to seek solutions outside of traditional approaches.
- How do they feel about working with people from other cultures and other social backgrounds?

It does not have to be a long, elaborate list. The important thing is that the people whose concern it is to select facilitators need to dialogue carefully about the characteristics of the facilitators they want to have in their program.

And who are these people who select the facilitators? Who determines the criteria for selection? Are they administrators? Are they experienced facilitators? Are they a representative group of the learners or students? What works in many projects, is a team of people sharing the responsibility of facilitator selection, the team including an administrator, some experienced facilitators, and also students. It is important to include learners in the dialogue about facilitator characteristics. It is vital for the members of the learning community to have some say in the selection of those who will become their facilitators, from participation

in the dialogue about characteristics to having an active role in interviewing the candidates to actually participating in the making of final decisions of whom to hire.

Many liberating education projects in this country are already including learners in this important decision. At the Institute del Progreso Latino in Chicago, for example, representatives of the adult Mexican immigrant study body interview prospective facilitators and decide which applicants to hire. Solidaridad Humana, in New York, also involves student "delegados" whenever possible in the interview and selection process, as does D.A.R.E. in Puerto Rico.

How can we find out whether an applicant has the characteristics we are looking for? A resume isn't going to tell us many of the things we want to know. Many projects rely on the personal interview, in which the candidates meet with the team composed of administrator, facilitators, and learners. But this interview is difficult, because it's not concerned solely with competencies. We can't very well ask in an interview: "Are you humble? Do you have faith in people? Have you committed class suicide?"

Planning for the interview then, in addition to identifying the characteristics of good facilitators, includes coming up with some very good questions that cannot be answered with a simple yes or no. It is often a good idea to describe a hypothetical problematic situation - one that is similar to something that's occurred in your project or your community - and ask, "What would you do in that situation?" For example, you might say, "Suppose one of your adult students comes up to you after class and offers to share with you a bit of high quality marijuana. How would you handle that?" Or, "Suppose it's the second day of class in your American history group and you discover that one of your middle-aged students is just beginning to learn to read and write. What would YOU do?" Develop your own questions as part of the planning work done by the team. . Think up your own as part of the planning work done by the team. If you do choose to make up hypothetical situations, they should be complex enough that a good answer is not obvious. For each characteristic that you have identified, think of a way to ask a question that will give you an idea of who that person really is and how he or she might interact with the other participants in your program.

There is a limit to what can be learned about a person in even a very skillfully conducted interview. We really get to know each other through the formation experiences through interacting with one another, and through observing one another in practice.

## **B. Selection of a Formation Coordinator**

How do you choose a formation coordinator?

Someone or some small group of people, needs to be chosen to help the facilitators by coordinating the formation program. Characteristics of this coordinator should include all those which apply to a good potential facilitator and then some. Certainly the coordinator should be someone who has faith in people, a person who is humble and patient, a good listener, mature, a person who identifies with the disenfranchised.

But the person selected to be formation coordinator needs to have special characteristics that go beyond those mentioned above.

The formation coordinator should have experience and skill as a Freirian facilitator. He or she should be familiar and comfortable with Freire's philosophy, and especially in asking critical questions.

The formation coordinator should have a good understanding of oppression, of the systems that oppress, and of the effects and causes of that oppression. He or she should be very clear that the goal of liberating education is ultimately social change and empowerment of the oppressed. If the coordinator is not dedicated to that social transformation and is not personally prepared to take the risks involved in breaking through a limit situation, then the

most that can be expected to happen is formation of facilitators in a humanistic, albeit alternative, approach.

It is necessary that educators be clear about their political choice and be consistent with it in practice. It is necessary to be militantly engaged, learning from the people... Without the feeling of true militancy we can become specialists with the illusion that we are neutral. (Freire, meeting with Alternative Schools Network, 1977, in Cynthia Brown's Literacy in 30 Hours, pp.62-63.)

Where to find the formation coordinator may depend to a certain extent on how long the project has been in operation. If the formation program is being planned for a project that has been in operation for some time, then perhaps one of the current facilitators, or a small core group of facilitators, could be selected by consensus of the larger group to serve as coordinator of formation. This, of course, presupposes that there are people on staff who have the characteristics described above. Selecting an "insider" to be formation coordinator needs to be done very carefully so as not to isolate one or two facilitators from their group of peers with a new identification as "experts." Sometimes, if there have been internal tensions among the facilitators in a project, it might be helpful to find an objective outsider to coordinate the experiences, to serve as facilitator of the facilitators.

## FORMATION EXPERIENCES

### A. Congruence Between the Process, the Philosophy and the Content: La Voz de la Gente

There is a common phenomenon that some of us have experienced. A new facilitator will talk about liberatory education in a very positive way, seeming to be quite familiar with Freire's ideas, and yet turn around and wind up actually "banking" when he or she gets face-to-face with students in the classroom.

Why does this happen?

I see two possible reasons. One has to do with the process of the facilitators' formation, and the other with the facilitators' backgrounds.

First of all, perhaps the formation experiences simply weren't adequate. Perhaps the process of the training seminar (or whatever it was called) was not consistent with the content of the message. People, whose only "hands on" experience with education up until now had been traditional (either as students or as teachers), were simply told what to do; they didn't have a chance to experience the process themselves as learners. Or perhaps the formation experiences ended too quickly, without an opportunity for on-going action and reflective dialogue.

The second reason might be what Freire has said so many times, that a facilitator's middle-class background interferes with his interactions with the learners, that middle-class facilitators are conditioned by their class position and by the myths of their superiority. The resistance is often not to the intellectual understanding of a concept of knowledge but to the action coherent with it.... We have observed, for example, that at the intellectual level the teachers in a training seminar may accept totally our analysis of the literacy education of adults as a creative act. They might agree that the learners should assume the role of Subjects in the process of learning their own language and of the expression of that language. Indeed teachers should not be that of transferring knowledge as though they knew everything and the learners knew nothing. They might even be able to apply certain methodological procedures coherent with these principles. In actual practice, however, many of these teachers are conditioned by their class position and by the myths of their superiority in relation to the peasants and workers. They assimilate these myths during their own class education and reduce the learners to mere depositories for their knowledge. (Letters, pp.15, 80- 81.)

If some facilitators intellectually understand and accept the ideas of liberatory education, and yet don't apply these ideas in their interactions with the learners, then we have a specific problem to address in planning for a formation program. My question now is, how far can a formation experience go in counteracting middle-class backgrounds and prejudices? Even a revolutionary facilitator with a middle-class background is likely to resort to banking his or her own economic and political analysis unless the formation program somehow gets across in a very gutsy way the idea that learning is discovery and choice and creativity and collective action and reflection.

From the ideology of his own class position, the educator, even when he verbalizes a revolutionary stance, does not perceive that to know is not to swallow knowledge. The act of teaching presupposes the act of learning and vice versa. If the educator takes refuge in his role as educator of the people without accepting his own need to be educated by the people, then his revolutionary oratory is counteracted by an alienating and reactionary practice. (Letters, p. 80.)

It is not only the middle-class facilitators who resort almost automatically to authoritarian patterns in the classroom. Facilitators who share the daily work lives of the learners as well as their national, cultural, and economic backgrounds often have the same tendency. All of us - learners, facilitators, administrators - have experienced traditional schooling; most of us have

nothing else. We have learned certain behaviors and attitudes so well that just being in a classroom triggers automatic responses. It's deeply ingrained. It is also like a security blanket; having and giving all the answers feels comfortable in the face of a circle of new learners who have arrived on the first day of class wanting to learn and expecting you to teach. "Maestro."

"Buenas tardes, Maestra." Instant, unearned respect, so easy, feels secretly good. Makes you want to show your stuff, earn that respect, GIVE THEM the information they need and so enthusiastically ask from you. It's powerful stuff, hard to fight.

Authoritarian teachers, ancient but vivid memories, sometimes sarcastic and almost always enjoying their power, form the only role models for most of us. The best ones we remember were the most dynamic, the most dramatic, the most in control. They're all we've EXPERIENCED, even if we've heard about other ways of doing it.

How can we combat all that? As organizers of a formation program, how can we provide NEW experience so profound that it will un-do habits learned through so many years of experience in schools, new experience so powerful that it will cut through assimilated middle-class myths of superiority, something that will go deeper than mere, intellectual understanding?

Is it possible?

It seems that it is not enough to simply TELL facilitators about the process, or to ask people to READ about empowerment. The experienced facilitator / coordinator cannot hand over his or her acquired experience and knowledge like a package to the new facilitator, nor can the coordinator hand over the personal acceptance of "his own need to be educated by the people."

There is often an unperceived contradiction between one's perception of the learning process and one's practice. The impatient educator often transfers knowledge like a package while discoursing volubly on the dynamic nature of knowledge. (Letters, p.64.)

If a facilitator cannot "transfer knowledge like a package" to the learners, then we, as coordinators of formation, should not expect to be able to transfer knowledge of how to be a facilitator to those participating in formation. It wouldn't be consistent with the philosophy. And it doesn't work very well (said the pragmatic North American).

Facilitators, in their own formation, somehow need to experience personally the same process they will later put into effect in their groups. We can't use "banking" techniques to "tell" someone how to be liberating. Again, it would be inconsistent.

It's easier to know what we can't do, and what won't work than to see clearly what we can do. What is possible? Where do we begin?

First of all, we have to continually remind ourselves that the facilitators participating in the formation seminar, no matter who they are, have much to offer to those who are coordinating the experiences. "Never underestimate the consciousness and the ingenuity of the people," said Michael James of Project Literacy in California. New facilitators count as people, too. It calls for starting off from a position of tremendous humility.

If the dichotomy between teaching and learning results in the refusal of the one who teaches to learn from the one being taught, it grows out of an ideology of domination. Those who are called to teach must first learn how to continue learning when they begin to teach .... (Letters, p. 9.)

What does an experienced Freirian facilitator and formation coordinator have to learn from beginning, less experienced facilitators? That is something we each need to be open to in each situation. No matter whether the facilitators in formation are Ph.D. candidates in Marxist political science, refugees from the middle-class carrying their heavy baggage with them, or

factory and farm workers who just a month ago were student participants in the basic adult education project, each one is a person with great dignity, humanity, and a wealth of experiences and insights to share. Each person has a reason for being there, a dream to realize and energy to make it work. Our job is to listen. And to respect.

I once wrote a long and what I thought to be an eloquent letter to a group of beginning facilitators in a small adult education project. I was quite pleased with myself and sent a copy of the letter to a dear friend who had once worked with Freire in developing literacy programs for West Africa. The feedback I got was humbling and brought me down to where I ought to have begun.

"Entiendo y comparto tus principios a nivel general," he began, "Pero no consigo escuchar en todo esto las voces principales, las de los facilitadores y las de los estudiantes. . . La voz de la gente no aparece ." (I understand and I share your principles on a general level, but I don't manage to hear, in all of this, the principal voices, those of the facilitators and those of the students. . . . The voice of the people doesn't appear.)

The first role of the formation coordinator is to listen, to give the facilitators information the chance to use their voice, right from the very beginning, to use their voice to name their own problem, to describe their expectations, their needs, to set the goals and objectives of the formation program together with the coordinator. This is the beginning of an experience in empowerment, in making decisions about the course of one's own learning, as part of a community of learners. The formation coordinator is part of that community.

We believe that learning involves an effort of searching, of discovery, of creativity, and of reflection. Somehow, in the course of the formation experiences, the facilitators need to be able to search out for themselves the important questions, the mutual concerns and needs among the group of facilitators, to discover at the same time the realities of the community in which they work, to create collectively solutions to the problems they identify (both problems relating to skill as a facilitator, and problems relating to the broader community), to act on those solutions, and to have the opportunity to reflect together about that action. The formation coordinator is part of that group, helping the participants to look critically at the problems they identify, providing some tools for a critical analysis both of the interaction between facilitators and learners, and of the interaction between learners (including facilitators) and the world. This critical analysis is not something the formation coordinator can GIVE to the facilitators. It is something you construct together.

The educator's task is not to ... uncover the object himself and to offer it, paternalistically, to the learner, thus denying him the effort of searching that is so indispensable to the act of knowing. Rather, in the connection between the educator and the learner ... the most important factor is the development of a critical attitude in relation to the object and not a discourse by the educator about the object. (Letters, p.11.)

This is hard to do. It is tempting to "uncover the object" when there is usually so little time available for facilitator formation. There are so many concepts that you want to explore, so much that's vital and important to understand. You are tempted to explain it clearly and move on to the next thing because pretty soon time will be up and the formation seminar will be over. Freire speaks of a tendency to "accelerate the process whether or not conditions are right...

This results in teaching without learning and the 'transfer' of knowledge because "'there is no time to lose.'" (Letters, p. 64.)

We are impatient, and understandably so, because there is so much to be accomplished, so many changes to be made, so much to learn. Freire talks a lot about the importance of patience:

Among the most obvious errors, we might note the impatience of some of the workers that led them to create the words instead of challenging the learners to do so for themselves. (Letters, p. 28.) .

And yet he also acknowledges the impatience. He advocates a healthy balance, "a permanent tension between patience and impatience."

Breaking the tension between patience and impatience... inevitably leads to teaching without dialogue. No matter what the intention, knowledge is presented as something finished, already concluded. (Letters. D. 64.1

What happens, of course, is that when an idea about liberating education - say, an idea about the importance of discovery in the process of learning - when that idea is presented as something finished and concluded, before people have arrived at that conclusion by figuring it out themselves, it's incorporated merely on an intellectual level, and we're back to the problem we started with. In telling about the importance of discovery too soon, we've sabotaged the act of discovery

This is not the same as saying that the role of the facilitator, or the role of the formation coordinator, is a passive one. Just as one can err on the side of being too impatient and "transferring" knowledge, one can also err on the side of being too patient, or passive.

When there is a rupture in the tension between patience and impatience, the opposite situation might also exist: impatience might also disappear. In this case educators may fall into passivity. 'Let everything stay as it is so that we can see what will happen' is an attitude that has nothing in common with the revolutionary stance. Patience is not conformity. The best way to accomplish those things that are impossible today is to do today whatever is possible. (Letters, p. 64)

It is a balance between asking critical questions of the facilitator in-formation to help them arrive at their own critical analysis, and being honest and sharing your own thoughts, too.

The educator must not press his own position to the point that the learner's position is a mere reflection of his own. At the same time, the educator must not negate, as though from shame, his own insights. (Letters, p. 92.)

Furnishing factual information is appropriate at the right time, but only in response to a problem posed by the facilitators-in-formation.

When the educator and the learner come close to the object of their analysis and become curious about its meaning, they need the kind of solid information that is indispensable to accurate analysis. To know is not to guess; but information is useful only when a problem has been posed. Without this basic problem-statement, the furnishing of information is not a significant moment in the act of learning and becomes simply the transfer of something from the educator to the learner... (Letters, p.11.)

There is a little vignette in something Freire wrote in Chile that is so eloquent and simple, that I want to put it in here, even though it isn't specifically about the formation of facilitator. It speaks about the importance of silences, the tremendous difficulty in being patient, and the intense power of discovery, of owning one's own learning.

En toda esta etapa de análisis , cabe al educador permanentemente, problematizar a los alfabetizandos y no solucionarles las dificultades.

Llega el momento, finalmente, en que se presenta al grupo la 'ficha del descubrimiento.'

Este es el momento fundamental.

Después de un silencio, que casi siempre inquieta al educador, en que el grupo permanece admirando las familias silábicas alienadas frente a él, comienza a crear, combinando silabas, una palabra.

ra-re-ri -ro-ru  
ma-me-mi-mo-mu  
da-de-di -do-du

'remo,' dice uno; 'risa' añade otro; 'Roma,' otro más. Dedo, dado, duda, mido, mira, miro, domo, dama, dome, dura, duro, rruro, mera, moro, mora, rama, rada, ramo, ramada, van todos creando, felices, sus palabras.

Nunca olvidaremos la emoción con que un hombre, en la primera experiencia que hacemos, dijo "Nina" frente a la ficha del descubrimiento con una jrisa casi incontenible.

- Que pasa? le preguntamos.
- Este es el nombre de mi mujer, contestó; él con intensa emoción.

This is contained in something Freire wrote called Sobre la Acción Cultural published in Santiago, Chile.<sup>1</sup>

If we agree with Freire that the silences are important, then we have to wait and be quiet for a while and not worry about wasting time. If we understand that patience is essential, then we can't hurry it up.

If we believe that it's in the process of dialogue that people grow and change, then we have to make time for real dialogue to happen. And if in our hearts we know that nothing of value will happen without a spirit of love and mutual trust, without a unity of understanding and a clarity about shared goals, without a willingness to take risks together, then we have to give time to forming that solid base.

Facilitator formation takes a long time. It is a long, ongoing process.

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout the stage of analysis, the educator's role is always to pose problems with the learners, and not to find solutions to the difficulties. The moment arrives, finally, in which the discovery board is presented to the group.

This is the fundamental moment.

After a silence, which is almost always disturbing to the educator, in which the group sits admiring the syllabic families lined up in front of it, somebody begins to create a word, combining syllables.

ra-re-ri-ro-ru  
ma-me-mi-mo-mu  
da-de-di-do-du

'remo' says one (row); 'risa' adds another (laugh); 'Roma', still another word (Rome). (Many samples of words formed by combining syllables from those presented.) They all go on, happily, creating their words.

We will never forget the emotion with which one man said "Nina" in front of the discovery board, with an almost uncontainable laughter. (This was during the first experience in which we did this.)

"What's going on?" we asked him.

"This is the name of my woman," he answered with intense emotion.

It is not something that can be considered "finished" after a weekend retreat or a three-session seminar.

It really never ends.

## **B. Planning the Formation Sessions**

The seminar belongs to us; the program has to be built by us together. (Freire, "Educating the Educator" Conference, New York, June 30, 1982.)

Plan it together. Begin with the facilitators' expressed needs and questions. Ask people what it is they hope to accomplish during the formation experiences. Listen to their responses and take them seriously.

The most potent demonstration you can provide of the importance of understanding the learners with whom your trainees will work - their environment, their needs, their learning objectives, and their resources for meeting these objectives - is, of course, to show that you understand the trainees with whom you are working. Let them see that you are taking into account their objectives. ... (From the Field, World Education, p. 25 .)

But it is more than just "taking into account" the objectives of the facilitators; it is a matter of actually forming the agenda together with the facilitators.

The facilitators have come to this seminar or training session or whatever you are calling it with certain expectations, with a set of questions they hope to get answered in the course of the experience. Perhaps they've come hoping to acquire some specific skills; it is likely some have arrived with strong ideas and skills they are hoping to be able to share with others. Some will bring along a whole set of anxieties about the prospect of being a facilitator.

Maybe the expectations of the facilitators parallel your own, maybe not. What if they are different? What do you do if the facilitators' stated objectives don't include some points you think are absolutely essential? Then be honest, and include your own expectations in the agenda along with theirs. You, as coordinator, are also part of the group. Just keep in mind the idea of the process being congruent with the philosophy. Regardless whether the ideas you have to share are about Freire's methodology, about political/economic analysis, or about group dynamics, it is important to remember that the giving of information only follows the posing of the question.

Perhaps the responses from the facilitators will include a wish to clarify the goals and purposes of the education center in which you are all working. Perhaps not. Perhaps they will initially focus primarily on skill development, or on understanding the philosophy of liberatory education. It is always possible that, in the course of the formation program, a review of the agenda will reveal that the goals have changed mid-stream, and that participants are realizing the need to explore other areas that had not surfaced earlier as needs.

At some point, most formation programs will probably want to address most of the following areas:

- familiarization with the community of the learners
- political/economic analysis of the context in which the facilitators are working; examining the possibilities for action, for transforming society where you are understanding of what is meant by "liberatory education" in your center; Freire's ideas; pedagogical (or "andragogical") theory
- development of skills in listening, in posing critical questions, in facilitating dialogue, in understanding group process, in dealing with conflict
- applying participatory methodology and critical analysis to specific curriculum areas - e.g., math, ESL, history, science, art

Begin where the facilitators are. Their most immediate concern is the issue with which you begin. If the facilitators design the formation program with you they will own it; it will be theirs.

The process of planning the formation, of identifying the problems which the facilitators want to address, of agreeing on the goals of the formation process, of setting up an agenda, is an important process which deserves time. I am reminded of a project of World Education, described in their Facilitator Skills Training Kit (now out of print) in which the trainers determined the goals of the facilitator training program and then presented the goals to the facilitators for their review in an exercise that was to take 10 minutes; Instructions read, "Give participants time to read goals and ask for their comments. Ask participants if they feel they can agree to work together to attain these goals."

The assumption is that all will meekly agree.

In a new paradigm, participation is not merely a function of implementation, but also of planning a program. (Jane K. Vella, Learning to Listen, p.7.)

It would be a mistake to try to design a formation program apart from the participation of the facilitators. To do that would be to take away their ownership of their own learning. When Freire thought about the need for a formation program for facilitators in Guinea-Bissau, he decided to go to that country without any detailed plan in mind.

We left Geneva ready to see and hear, to inquire and to discuss. In our baggage we carried no saving plans or reports semi-prepared. As a team, we had talked in Geneva about the best way to see and hear, inquire and discuss so that the plan for our contribution might result - a plan for a program that would be born there, in dialogue with people of the country, about their own reality, their needs, and the possibility of our assistance. We could not design such a plan for them in Geneva. (Letters, p.12.)

### **C. Building Trust**

A major problem in setting up the program is instructing the teams of coordinators. Teaching the purely technical aspect of the procedure is not difficult; the difficulty lies rather in the creation of a new attitude - that of dialogue, so absent in our own upbringing and education. The coordinators must be converted to dialogue in order to carry out education rather than domestication. (Freire, Education for Critical Consciousness, p.52.)

Liberatory education is not a solitary thing. It is something we do together in a group - naming a problem, analyzing it, figuring out solutions to it, taking action (involving some risk), and then reflecting together before taking more action.

The core of this very human, supportive, and creative business is dialogue.

Dialogue creates a critical attitude. It is nourished by love, humility, hope, faith, and trust. When the two 'poles' of the dialogue are thus linked by love, hope, and mutual trust, they can join in a critical search for something. Only dialogue truly communicates. (Pedagogy, p.45.)

Dialogue, then, is also the basis for learning in the facilitator formation program. But it is not going to work unless people trust one another, especially since we are ultimately talking about taking risks together. And not much is going to come of it unless there is a spirit of hope that we are all moving along together in more or less the same direction, sharing the same goals, developing something for the same purpose.

So how do we develop that trust, that spirit of hope, among the facilitators? How can we help build a mutual respect and empathy among all participants of the group? How do we build a sense of community, a valuing of that growth of community?

Group process training manuals speak of "icebreaker" exercises that might last an hour, in which participants are to "get acquainted." They are nice and usually lots of fun, but they don't fill the bill. We need something more profound than what can be achieved through a simple group dynamics game.

First of all, the actual participation in planning the program is a beginning in the building of trust. All the participants in the group – the facilitators and the coordinator - hear one another's concerns, begin to see some commonalities, begin to gain an understanding of one another's needs and motivations for being there.

The very process of naming the problem together, the process of agreeing on the naming of the problem, of setting goals together, or sharing personal feelings relative to the central issue, is an indispensable phase of building trust.

But this process of agreeing on the goals and the agenda isn't easy. There will most likely be differences of opinion, and that's fine and necessary.

Cohesiveness is not a matter of agreement, but of healthy interaction among group members with differing viewpoints, capabilities, and roles... If a group is too complete in its agreement, it loses its spirit, and there can be no real growth or change in its members or of the group-as-a-whole. It becomes an aggregate of contented cows.' (Margaret E. Kuhn, You Can't Be Human Alone.)

Freire agrees about the healthiness and important function of conflicts. "Conflicts are the midwives of consciousness," he said at the New York conference (1982).

Successful resolution of early conflicts and tensions is another important factor in the building of trust. Somehow, the conflicts need to be resolved in such a way that the opinions expressed are listened to and respected. This is one place where the formation coordinator's skills need to be sharp and strong. The members of the group may need help in the beginning in order to enable each other to express themselves and to be heard. They need to know that the group is a safe place in which to express ideas and feelings, that destructive or self-serving behavior will not be allowed to go on. The early conflicts and the way in which they are resolved can be almost like a test of trustworthiness of the group as a whole. The formation coordinator here serves as a model for the rest of the facilitators - a model of respect for conflicting opinions, and a model of good conflict resolution.

Another important factor in the building of trust is a sharing of the personal self of each participant.

...There can be no group until the ideas and feelings of each member - and his intentions - have been awakened and clarified; communicated by him; and understood and appropriated willingly by every other member of the group; and finally interwoven into a group climate, group viewpoint, and goal. (Ross Snyder, A Theory of Group Dynamics, Chicago Theological Seminary.)

If we are talking about ultimately transforming society, then we need to be about the business of building lasting, deep, and trusting relationships. Leonard Andiano of the Mexican American Cultural Center in San Antonio, Texas, states emphatically that the participants have to know each other well, beyond the formal introduction. Where do their grandparents come from? Where were they born? Where do they live? What were their childhood experiences? What are their family experiences now? Their economic conditions? What kind of jobs do they hold? What are their hopes and frustrations? Their dreams? Their fears?

The member of a trusting community begins to learn about himself or herself in the process of sharing with others.

The member gradually unpacks the suitcase of his emotions and mind - the 'ghost agenda' of hurts, frustrations, fears he has acquired from other relationships with

parents, teachers, peers. He begins to see himself as he operates, and to see what happens when he is understood rather than ignored. He begins to test out better ways of carrying on conflicts and of expressing himself. He loses the need to be defensive, passive... (Snyder, Theory of Group Dynamics.)

This is scary. Getting in touch with deeply personal parts of our lives, , and then sharing those things with other people, can be very threatening, and it is not necessarily the most appropriate thing to do in the very beginning. The group can begin by sharing other aspects of their lives that are not so very personal - sharing interests and concerns, sharing what they want to share - and then finding out what the commonalities are. What makes us the same?

I trust someone whose personal agenda I understand. I withhold my trust if I suspect some kind of hidden agenda, or some wish to manipulate me.

The formation coordinator who is concerned about building trust within a group must be a trustworthy person herself or himself. This isn't easy. Trust is something that's learned. It requires humility and honesty. I am reminded again of something Freire said at the conference in New York in June:

It's OK to say, 'Look, I really don't know how to answer.' What the educator cannot do is to escape by lying. We have to say, '-Look, I don't know but the question is important, and I would like to know.'

That kind of humility and honesty comes from a genuine respect for the participants, and it generates trust. Respect for the dignity, the integrity and the intellect of each participant is absolutely essential.

I am disturbed by some group dynamics exercises that seem to be artificially engineered to effect a surprise "discovery" on the part of the participants.

My concern is that we not pull pranks on the participants, "fool" them with a phony game which we engineer so that they can have a joint experience upon which to reflect. They should know what's going on and why it is going on, and have chosen to do it that way by consensus. Otherwise, it is a breach of respect and can break the trust.

It is disrespectful to invite people to do a task without explaining why the task is to be done, and how the results of it will be shared. (Jane K. Vella, Learning to Listen, p. 5.)

Establishing trust can't be done in one night. It would be so easy if we could simply do some ice-breaker exercises and presto-change-o have instant trust already established. But the building of trust is an ongoing thing. It doesn't stop with the initial naming of a problem together, or with a one-time sharing of personal lives. It's something that should keep on getting stronger and more intimate, or more personal, as the solidarity of the members of the group of facilitators grows into a close community-

#### **D. Understanding the Community and Learning from the People**

An essential part of the formation of facilitators is their appreciation and their understanding of the lives of the learners. It is in the daily realities of people's lives that the experience of power and of oppression become real. The facilitator needs to be very close to the community in order to understand that

... (se trata) de crear mecanismos a partir de la naturaleza del grupo para que ellos hagan conjuntamente con el aprendizaje de ESL una experiencia de poder en algo que como el ingles afecta profundamente sus vidas: De que manera hacerlo? A traves de la observacion militante del grupo humano, de su dinamica, de sus perspectivas , de su cotidiano esencial, para determinar muy concretamente los

puntos de opresión ultraconcretos en el día a día de las personas. (Marcelo Zwierzynski, Institute del Progreso Latino.).<sup>2</sup>

Facilitators who are not members of the community in which their students live, and who do not have a similar economic and cultural background, have much to learn from that community. There is a richness of culture and language to be discovered. There are realities of housing and markets and childcare and cantinas and the little place around the corner where the kids go to buy their paletas. Where do people go to find work? Do they have to travel a long way? Are there jobs to be found? What's it like in the workplace? Are there health care services in the community? What language is spoken in the clinic? Where do kids go to school? What's that like?

If we are talking about a community of immigrants living within the mainland U.S., then there is a host of feelings about living up here in this foreign land, and even stronger feelings about the home they left behind. There's a whole set of fears and hopes for their future, and for their children's future.

Yet these "facts" about a community only scratch the surface. A community is a dynamic, living, breathing entity. To really understand, one has to live there, to live as part of a family there, to be a participant in that life. Even then, an outsider has the freedom to leave that place, and that possibility of exit makes voluntary poverty not at all the same. Nevertheless, for those who want to really learn, living the life of the people, with the people, is the best way.

Prime Minister Maurice Bishop of Grenada spoke to the young literacy volunteers in his country about the importance of becoming one with the people in the community. He says it better than anyone else - he describes the ideal.

This whole question of integrating yourself with your learner is obviously of great importance. It is not by accident after all that the Cubans, when they embarked in their literacy campaign in 1960, decided that they must close down their school system for twelve months and free up the schools - take all the students, take all the teachers send them into the mountains and into the bushes to teach the learners. Why? Because it was felt quite correctly that it would be a lot more difficult to try to get these learners to come to centres and be taught there. It would be much better if it were possible to send the volunteer teachers right into the homes of the learners so that they become fully integrated with the learner. They stay in the house, they sleep in the house, they eat in the house, they get up in the morning and they go out to work with the particular learner. They return home at lunch they have lunch with him, they go back out in the evening and on the nights when the learner says "well, I tired no more lessons for me" you just close the book and you go to sleep too. And the night when he says "let us go down to town they have a fete in the village/" you do down in town and you fete too. And the night when he says "is time to fire one" you fire one too. On the night when he says "let us play dominoes," you play dominoes too. That is really fully integrating yourself with the learner and that is showing maximum respect for the learner, and a recognition of the problems the learner has. It is also a way of yourself learning something from the learner, because while we have the book - knowledge and the certification, we do not always have the education. Let us always make a fundamental difference between 'certification' and 'education' - they are not the same things. And those poor, humble learners do have a lot to teach us. They have great experience, they have vast, vast, vast reservoirs of practical knowledge, and they do have an approach to life, an approach to the world, an approach to their country that will tell us a lot about where we have come from and

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<sup>2</sup> The idea is to create mechanisms beginning with the nature of the group so that they can have, along with their learning of ESL (or other subjects), an experience of power in something which profoundly affects their lives. How do you do this? Through the militant observation of the human group, of their dynamic, of their perspectives, of the essence of their daily lives, in order to determine very concretely the ultra concrete points of oppression in the day-to-day lives of the persons.

therefore where we can go and how fast we can go when we want to go. We can learn something from these learners." - From the address by Prime Minister Cde. Maurice Bishop, C.P.E. Evaluation Congress Report, October 18, 1980, Grenada.

In Nicaragua, literacy volunteers followed the pattern set by the volunteers in Cuba and Grenada. One of the most eloquent statements about a learner teaching the facilitator was made by a Nicaraguan peasant speaking to the mother of his young literacy teacher:

Do you know I am not ignorant any more. I know how to read now. Not perfectly, you understand, but I know how. And do you know, your son isn't ignorant any more either. Now he knows how we live, what we eat, how we work and he knows the life of the mountains. Your son, ma'am, has learned to read from our book. ("Nicaragua 1980: The Battle of the ABC's" by Fernando Cardenal, S.J., and Valerie Koller, Harvard Educational Review, Vol.51, No.1, 1981.)

Not all of our facilitators are free to leave their families and to live as full participants in the community of the learners. Facilitators who can't live in the community nevertheless need to have some way to familiarize themselves with the lives of the people in more than just a superficial way.

In Brazil, as a first step, Freire suggested that teams of educators go into the community to talk to people as a way of researching their vocabulary. This was a way to identify "generative words" which would later become the basis for dialogue. As he describes these "informal encounters" with the people, he says:

These interviews reveal longings, frustrations, disbeliefs, hopes, and an impetus to participate. During this initial phase the team of educators form rewarding relationships and discover often unsuspected exuberance and beauty... (Education for a Critical Consciousness, p.49.)

Nina Wallerstein, author of Language and Culture in Conflict, describes this process as "an approach much like anthropological fieldwork," and says that "everyone - students and teachers - participates in it on an ongoing and equal basis." Nina has some very specific suggestions of things that a facilitator new to a community can do to learn from the people. In addition to informal conversations and paying attention to nonverbal communication, Nina suggests:

Take a walk through your students' community. When you get home, write down what you saw. Anthropologists employ this technique to get a general overview, and then to focus on activities that seem particularly meaningful.

Take photographs of their neighborhood. The fixed, flat field of a still photo will enable you to see many more parts of the reality that you are observing. Your naked eye is simply very selective.

Draw a map of the houses and buildings in the area. How far away is the grocery store? Who goes there? How are the prices? The array and the quality of the food? What does it feel like inside? Visit your students in their houses. After you leave, write down what you saw. Perhaps they would allow you to take pictures inside... Be systematic about it. If you take a walk through the community at the same time on the same day every week, you will see more deeply than if you go at random, unrelated times. If you visit the same street corner at three different times on the same day, you will have the pieces necessary to begin to see patterns which you can discuss with your students.

It is obvious that this takes time. Give it time, even if it is only a little time, on a regular basis. The investment is well worth it. (From an unpublished paper by Nina Wallerstein and Pia Moriarty. These ideas are treated in further detail in Nina's book, Language and Culture in Conflict. See section on Resources).

Somehow, as a part of the formation program, and as one of the early experiences, you need to address the issue of understanding the lives and the culture of the learners. Becoming familiar with the realities of the community in which the learners live is essential. However you decide to do it, it's probably important to choose a way that will get people out into the barrio so that they can talk to people, interact, participate in the life of the community to the fullest extent that makes sense in your situation. Just exactly how you decide to do that depends on the needs of the facilitators, the extent of their own personal distance from the lives of the learners. If some of the learners are involved in planning this part of the formation program, they are sure to add some rich and creative ways to introduce their own community's realities to the facilitators. But don't stop at the dialogue! Get people out there, into the waiting rooms of the clinic, into the bars and grocery stores, into the employment office or the public aid interview, into people's kitchens and back porches. Your limits are bounded by the curiosity of the facilitators and the interest and invitation of the learners working with them. Make time for this to happen, and remember it's not just a one-time thing

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