

Use of the group to enhance learning opportunities

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Learning is the acquisition of new knowledge, as well as the modifying and reinforcement of existing knowledge, attitudes, skills and competencies. Learning enables you to effectively function in everyday life. Learning can be many things (e.g., formal or informal, informed by inquiry, curiosity, experiential learning, instruction, teaching, coaching, tuition, tutoring and guidance). Increasingly, it is vital for people to continue to learn as a part of a group. Group-based learning is highly effective due to its efficiency, normalisation, and the availability of demonstration and simulation opportunities.

This chapter explores how group work can enhance learning opportunities in the community services and health sector environments. It also clarifies the distinction between group leadership and group facilitation; explores how using groups can enhance learning opportunities; and discusses how group leadership can enhance learning opportunities.

DIFFERENCE BETWEEN BEING A FACILITATOR AND A GROUP LEADER

‘Facilitation’ is a key term used frequently within the community services and health sectors to describe the roles of group leadership, training and organisational development and/or the processes involved. However, in the breadth of its application it loses some of its clarity and some cases may better be described by the term ‘group

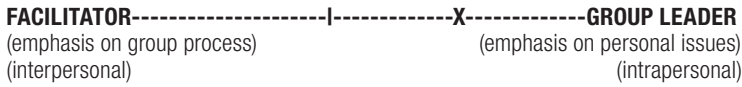
leader'. Most group programs today in the community services and health sectors are created as a response to a crisis (support group); to support the acquisition of new skills or to challenge (parenting education); to support people coping with anxiety or other trauma issues (specific treatment programs); or for dealing with family separation or addictions (peer support groups). While the skill of facilitation is important and used by both facilitators and group leaders, it is vital to recognise the breadth and depth of the skills being used by a 'group leader'. While these terms are often used interchangeably, it is useful to identify their differences. The following unique roles of a group leader that are not part of a facilitator's role are discussed in this chapter:

- Intent – a group leader models themselves as an agent of change through the use of empathy to reflect values, ideas, and responsiveness to the participants and the purpose of the group;
- Application of Systems Theory – a group leader provides a framework to support change *within* the participants alongside the process of facilitation;
- Active use of experiential learning cycle – a group leader monitors the learning cycle stages and adapts the cycle to respond to individual differences within a group.

1. THE INTENT OF THE GROUP LEADER

The difference between a *group facilitator* and a *group leader* can be expressed on a continuum between interpersonal and intrapersonal issues relating to the intent for which the group is run (see Figure 1). According to Jacobs (2013), the ideal position, for the worker doing group work in a community services group, is to align their role in the group as approximately 80% along the continuum towards being a group leader rather than solely as a facilitator (as indicated by the 'x'). This position impacts on the skill sets they use, the group goals they create, and the view they have of their role and the professional associations they join. These issues will be discussed below.

Figure 1: Difference between role of facilitator and group leader (Jacobs, 2013, p.2).



While community services often define facilitation as pertaining to any role involving running a group, the literature's definition of a facilitator is very specific. Facilitators primarily focus on group processes and interpersonal issues that affect decision making (Kaner, Lind, Toldi, Fisk & Berger, 2007). Therefore the accurate definition of a facilitator is someone who helps a group of people understand their common objectives and assists them to plan for their achievement without taking a particular position in the discussion. Authors have described a facilitator as:

...an individual who enables groups and organisations to work more effectively; to collaborate and achieve synergy. He or she is a 'content neutral' party who, by not taking sides or expressing or advocating a point of view during the meeting, can advocate for fair, open, and inclusive procedures to accomplish the group's work. (Kaner, Lind, Toldi, Fisk, & Berger, 2007, p.xix)

...one who contributes structure and process to interactions so groups are able to function effectively and make high-quality decisions. A helper and enabler whose goal is to support others as they achieve exceptional performance. (Bens, 2000, p.5)

...[Someone who] supports everyone to do their best thinking and practice. To do this, the facilitator encourages full participation, promotes mutual understanding and cultivates shared responsibility. By supporting everyone to do their best thinking, a facilitator enables group members to search for inclusive solutions and build sustainable agreements. (Kaner, Lind, Toldi, Fisk & Berger, 2007, p. xvii)

...[One whose role is to] bring an understanding of human interaction and how to make the most of valuable time spent together. A facilitator can be part of, or apart from, the group... A facilitator is concerned about the overall arc of a meeting or workshop, encouraging participation, surfacing dissenting views, encouraging listening and dialogue and building connections and meaning. (McWaters & Morre, 2013, p.8)

According to McWaters (2013) the main difference between facilitation and group leadership lies in the group's expectations. A facilitator relies on the group to reach its own conclusions, highlighting similarities and differences and provide ways for the group to deal with them. A facilitator may raise more questions for a group, open up new issues, and take individuals and the group to a place where they feel uncomfortable. McWaters recognises that the facilitator is not entirely neutral, as every word, action, movement, and process used influences the group either consciously or sub-consciously. According to McWaters a group leader is expected to have an opinion and to advocate for that opinion. Depending on the group's decision-making approach, the leader will advocate a certain position or may decide between different options. The group looks to the leader to resolve, or at least make a call on, some of the more difficult decisions confronting the group. The context of the group must be kept at the forefront of the leaders' intent. This includes attending to the internal and external politics surrounding the group and its work, and having one foot firmly on the ground and an eye on the bigger picture. This enables them to be a grounded visionary. The concept of leader is influenced by people's perception of national leaders and other influential figures who appear in the media.

Johnson and Johnson define group leadership as

...influencing the destination and the direction for the group to go... A group leader is a person who can influence others to be more effective in working towards the achievement of their mutual goals and maintain effective working relationships among members. (2009, p.168)

Corey identifies facilitating as one of the key skills used by group leaders. The group leader uses the following seven skills to facilitate the group process:

- Assisting members to openly express their fears and expectations;
 - Actively working to create a climate of safety and acceptance in which people will trust one another and therefore engage in productive interchanges;
 - Providing encouragement and support as members explore highly personal material or as they try new behaviours;
 - Involving as many members as possible in the group interaction by inviting and sometimes even challenging members to participate;
 - Working towards lessening the dependency of the group on themselves as the leader;
 - Encouraging open expression of conflict and controversy;
 - Helping members overcome barriers to direct communication.
- (2012, p.35)

King (2011) acknowledges that the group leader responds to the primary and secondary purpose that motivates people to attend the group. The primary purpose is the group's advertised focus and purpose. The secondary purpose is the experience of emotional turbulence that motivates people to see the group as a possible solution or tool to assist them. If the person is to fully commit to learning in the group, their secondary purpose needs to be valued, recognised and addressed as long as it is not outside the contract of the group's purpose. The group leader needs to develop a cohesive and trusting environment to allow the secondary purpose to be expressed.

2. APPLYING SYSTEMS THEORY

Systems Theory has had a significant impact on how groups are defined and structured (see Figure 2). Gillette & McCollom (1990) describe how both *facilitators* and *group leaders* are informed by different system levels.

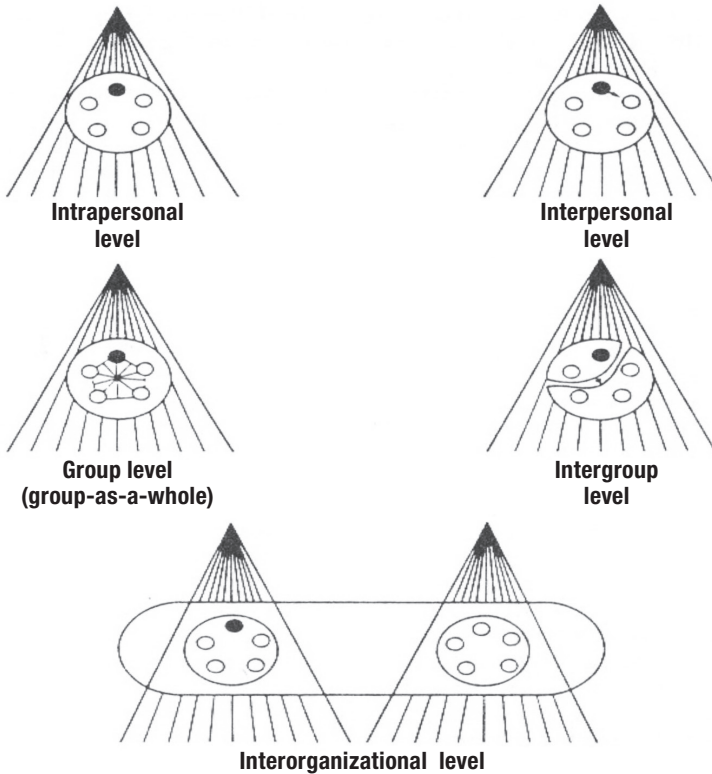
Group leaders are strongly informed by:

- Intrapersonal Level – dynamics within the individual – Typical tasks for the group leader involve understanding character and personality traits, individual needs, pathological needs and challenges.
- Interpersonal Level – dynamics between group members – Typical tasks for the group leader involve the exploration of communication patterns, information flow, level of trust and conflict and the different roles people use.
- Group Level – group as a whole – Typical tasks for the group leader include using this perspective as the core focus for understanding group systems and dynamics. The impact of these behaviours shows in the behaviour of group members without being defined or owned solely by one individual.

Facilitators are strongly informed by:

- Interpersonal Level – dynamics between group members – Typical tasks for the group leader involve the exploration of communication patterns, information flow, level of trust and conflict and the different roles people use.
- Intergroup Level – relationships between various sub-groups of group members – Typical tasks for the group leader involve exploring power, race, gender, age, ethnicity, ideologies and social class issues.
- Interorganisational Level – relationships between organisations and the broader environment or community – Typical tasks for the group leader involve looking at the forces on the organisation (inputs and outputs) and its impact on wider systems and entities.

Figure 2: Various levels of systems (Gillette and McCollom, 1990 p.53)



Modern day facilitation informs both facilitators and group leaders and originates from Facilitation Theory that was developed during the 1980s by Carl Rogers and other contributors:

We know...that the initiation of such learning rests not upon the teaching skills of the leader, not upon his scholarly knowledge of the field, not upon his curricular planning, not upon his use of audio-visual aids, not upon the programed learning he utilises, not upon his lectures and presentations, not upon

an abundance of books, although each of these might at one time or another be utilized as an important resource. No, the facilitation of significant learning rests upon certain attitudinal qualities which exist in the personal relationship between the facilitator and the learner. (Rogers, 1969 p.65)

Both group leaders and facilitators recognise that the process of change is located in each individual. This means that all group work is best informed when it is based on experiential learning as this maximises meaning and personal relevance. Learning and change arise as a result of natural curiosity, with the active engagement with the learning materials and group environment. Rogers states: “We cannot teach another person directly; we can only facilitate their learning” (1961, p.286).

Rogers’ (1969) core conditions, three attitudinal qualities necessary for facilitative practice (both in group work and facilitation), are ‘Realness’ ‘Acceptance, trust and caring’ and ‘Empathy’. Similarly, Yalom (2005) found that, regardless of the type of group being facilitated, group member outcomes were stronger when the leader had high levels of ‘Caring’ and ‘Use of meaning attribution’ i.e., where the group leader clearly communicates how the learning in the group is related to group members’ ‘broader’ life.

The leader also has to have medium levels of ‘Stimulation’ (involvement and charisma) and ‘Executive function’ (providing structure for the participants’ basic needs and direction).

Jacobs identified that it is the group leader’s responsibility to:

- Lead well, so that people do not mind actively participating in group work programs;
- Be creative, courageous and make sure that the group is not boring. (2013, p.3)

The group leader’s role is to:

- Have clarity of purpose;
- Pay appropriate attention to the formation of the group, that is, group composition and size, meeting time, setting etc.;
- Plan the sessions;

- Pay attention to the stage of development of the group;
- Avoid allowing the warm-up phase to last too long;
- Manage the available time and ensure a suitable close to the session;
- Have a dynamic opening to the first session, avoiding excessively long or irrelevant introductions and starting with ground rules;
- Establish a positive, working tone for the group;
- Not allow the group to be boring, superficial or irrelevant; not deepening the focus;
- Avoid allowing the group to focus too long on one person;
- Moderate participation to avoid one or two members dominating;
- Allow the group to develop a relaxed flow of discussion, rather than a pattern of 'leader – member – leader – member';
- Include other members when working with one member, avoiding boring one-on-one counselling;
- Offer members a theoretical model to use in understanding their problems;
- Use a multi-sensory approach;
- Avoid using too many exercises, or exercises that take too long;
- Process exercises to meaningful levels. (Jacobs, 2013, p. 6)

To enable a group to arrive at an appropriate destination, more is required from the leader than the application of Facilitation Theory. Using Systems Theory-based responses, the leader provides a framework to support change alongside the process of facilitation. The interconnection of the Intrapersonal, Interpersonal and Group-as-a-whole levels of Systems Theory is captured by Jacobs (2013) and the 'Four Ms' of Impact Therapy. Impact Therapy argues that group work has the greatest impact on its members when the leader ensures that the group has the following features:

- Multi-sensory (visual and tactile in its learning experiences),
- Motivational (increases motivation by responding to significant hopes/dreams and acknowledging challenges),
- Marketing (identifying the usefulness and relevance of the group experience), and the use of
- Maps (practice-based psychological theories, tools and social frameworks).

3. ACTIVE USE OF EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING CYCLE

Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle (ELC; Kolb & Kolb, 2008) provides a way to understand adult learning. Kolb's model has been extensively applied across many settings including business, university and group leadership contexts. The ELC "portrays two dialectically related modes of grasping experience – Concrete Experience and Abstract Conceptualisation – and two dialectically related modes of transforming experience – Reflective Observation and Active Experimentation" (Kolb & Kolb, 2008, p.298). Both these modes describe the interaction between the four learning styles that they contain. Kolb argues that people utilise the learning styles as a spiralling process as they interact with their environment, with each style being a dynamic state and not a psychological trait. "The experiential learning cycle is actually a learning spiral. When concrete experience is enriched by reflection, given meaning by thinking, and transformed by action, the new experience created becomes richer" (Kolb & Kolb, 2008, p.309).

ELC identifies processes that occur within the individual that enable learning to occur (see Figure 3). This process allows education-
alists to better understand the steps in experiential learning. Newman describes the principles of the ELC basic framework:

People change and adapt to the world through learning.

Learning involves two basic processes:

- grasping (prehension);
- transformation.

People learn in four ways:

- through immediate experience (feeling or affective mode);
- through observation and reflection (watching or perceptual mode);
- through conceptualisation (thinking or symbolic mode); and
- through active experimentation (doing or behavioural mode).

Effective learning is spiral starting with concrete experience and involves all four styles.

Learning is developmental. People go through the following stages in their life:

- Acquisition – birth to adolescence;
- Specialisation – young adulthood, adulthood; and
- Integration– later in life.

Learning is social. Life's experiences mean that we develop a dominant learning style.

Learning is interactive. It involves feedback from other people.

Learning is a dialectic process. It involves people acting on and reacting to their environment (1995, p.39).

Critique and Application of Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle

In 2008, Kolb used the development of Meta-Cognition Theory to describe how learning moves from an applied level to a conscious introspection (meta-cognition) level. He argued that people select a learning strategy that best suits the situation and then apply it (Kolb & Kolb, 2008, p.302). Paulo Freire used a similar self-concept of learning in which critical consciousness supports the individual to develop 'praxis', where reflection and action are used to transform the immediate social context (Kolb & Kolb, 2008, p.305). These positions are very relevant to group work, as the group leader uses 'perceived equality' between participants to combine the immediate environment, purpose and here-and-now experiences to encourage praxis (critical reflection and action) that supports change in people's lives.

Experience "is enriched by reflection, given meaning by thinking and then transformed by action" with a new experience being created that is richer, broader and deeper (Kolb & Kolb, 2008, p.309). Every leader and group member uses a mixture of the learning styles described. To be an effective leader, it is important to create a group experience that contains a collection of processes that addresses all of these learning styles. If the group process is dominated by only one or two styles, then the group members who learn through the other styles are likely to become restless or bored.

While the ELC derives its name from the centrality of the Experience-Conceptualisation dimension, there is a useful argument for viewing the cycle from the Reflection-Action dimension. The model is flexible enough to accommodate this dual adaptability (Kolb, 1976, p.8). Freire saw praxis as the primary focus for learning where transformation is driven by the dialectic between reflection and action. It is this dimension that drives empowerment in group work as people reclaim the power of their overt/covert reflections about life and the most important actions they need to mobilise. Freire recognises the significance of the:

...two dimensions, reflection and action, in such radical interaction that if one is sacrificed – even in part – the other immediately suffers... When a word is deprived of its dimension of action, reflection automatically suffers as well; and the word is changed into idle chatter, into verbalism, into an alienated and alienating ‘blah’... On the other hand, if the action is emphasized exclusively, to the detriment of reflection, the word is converted into activism. The latter action for action’s sake negates the true praxis and makes dialogue impossible. (Freire, 1992, pp.75-78)

This process creates a ‘mastery response’ as participants realise that they have agency and are bigger and better than the immediate problems they face. This allows for a more flexible learning self-identity to emerge where participants embrace new experiences, are challenged, change and learn from mistakes and others’ success. Alternatively, people often become stuck when they have a rigid learning self-identity as they avoid challenge, use negative self-talk, give up easily, avoid risk, failure and feedback and often resent the success of others (Kolb & Kolb, 2008, p.306).

Kolb’s model has been criticised for paying insufficient attention to reflection (Boud, Keogh & Walker, 1985); culture-based differences, context and emotion (Anderson, 1988); context and emotion (Boud, Keogh & Walker, 1996); whether the learning occurs merely as preferred learning modes (De Ciantis & Kirton, 1996); and the theoretical foundation of the learner types due to the undervaluing of the environment in which learning occurs (Garner, 2000). Later criticisms

have included that the model does not meet the simplification test (Bergsteiner & Avery, 2014, pp.8-9).

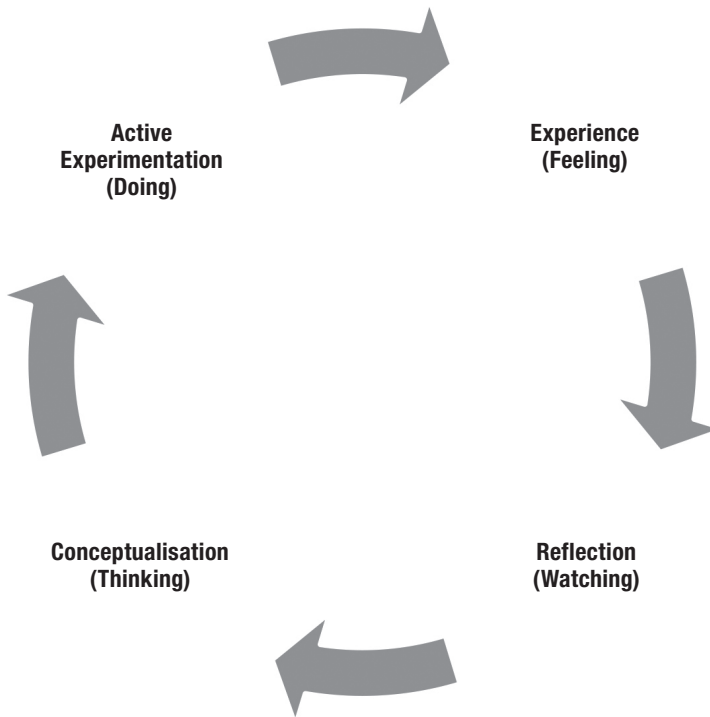
Bergsteiner & Avery (2014) criticised Kolb's theory that reflective observation negates current research that people continually reflect and evaluate throughout the learning process. However Kolb's theory centres on a spiral approach that involves the continuous integration of all four learning styles. Many of the criticisms of Kolb's theory are based on the observation that the major emphasis for research involves academic and business contexts. The debate involves the fixed nature of the learning styles and whether learning is more determined by nature or nurture (trait or state). Kolb has clearly named it as a dynamic state in which culture, environment and context are key variables.

Application of the Experiential Learning Cycle to group work

Principle one: everyone uses all four learning styles to different degrees

Since the learning modes have dialectic relationships, learning involves the balance and utilisation of each dimension. Overall, learning is enhanced when group members utilise the two learning modes or all four learning styles (Kolb & Kolb, 2008, p.319). Kolb's ELC is very important for group leadership, however the language and emphasis of the dialectic dimension is worthy of change. While it is useful in academic and business contexts, it is not useful for community, family or group work contexts. Are labelling of the learning styles to 'Watching', 'Thinking', 'Doing' and 'Feeling'(Slattery, 2000) is recommended for these situations.

Reflection	Watching	Making use of and investigating experience, use of feelings and intuition, ideas and options.
Conceptualisation	Thinking	Analysing and creating meaning, asking 'why?'
Active experimentation	Doing	Preparing for action, trying things out.
Experience	Feeling	Being open to, aware of and valuing experience.



Principle two: dominant learning style and shadow sides may occur – the four dominant learning styles are evenly distributed in the population

Group members often have a dominant learning style that is ideally balanced with the surrounding learning styles. Kolb described the ELC as a tool to enhance learning and to appreciate the strengths and weaknesses we experience in that situation (Kolb, 1976, pp.25-26). The idea of dominance can be understood by using the metaphor of an engine (the learning process) and a starter motor (dominant learning style). While the engine operates using all four learning styles (i.e. pistons), the process primarily starts when our dominant learning style is valued and catered for (i.e. starter motor). As a thinker, a group member looks for clarity of ideas, research, and a chance to examine how the learning can be applied in their situation. Until this engagement occurs, a thinker may remain removed from, or critical of, what is

occurring. Groups often have a 25% distribution of dominant learning styles – Watching, Thinking, Doing and Feeling. Cultural differences appear to impact on the significance of the dominant learning styles. East Asian and Aboriginal Australian communities place a stronger emphasis on the Watching learning style. This needs to be understood before the other learning styles are mobilised.

However, a dominant learning style can be over-utilised and may not always be balanced with the use of the other styles. This over-use is called a ‘shadow-side’. Table 1 uses Kolb’s theory to highlight both the core strengths and possible shadow-sides (Kolb & Kolb, 2008, p.316). Group leaders operate best when they internally balance their use of the four learning styles and minimised the impact of their shadow sides.

Table 1: Overview of the core strength of each learning style when balanced and possible shadow-side.

Learning style	Core strength when it is a balanced dominant learning style	Possible shadow-side
Reflecting (Watching)	When the Watching learning style balances Feeling and Thinking this learning style has a capacity for deep reflection informed by the ability to be feeling and thinking-orientated. They thrive in environments that allow for deep discussion, reflection and thoughtful readings that enable them to better understand why and how the world operates the way it does. The essence of being a ‘reflective observer’ is essential in group leadership. When mobilised well (with an appropriate balance of the other learning styles), it is from this place that the other learning styles emerge.	When someone is very strong in reflecting, they can find themselves procrastinating. They may have trouble putting reflections into action or being overloaded by what they are observing. This imbalanced cycle lacks the opportunity to use meta-learning to reality test ideas in action.

Thinking	When the Thinking learning style balances Reflecting and Acting this learning style is strong in concept development, analysis, questioning, critique, evaluation and testing ideas in the real world. They thrive on creating conceptual models that can be applied, or generalised, to other situations.	When someone is very strong in thinking, they can find themselves over-intellectualising a situation and being more removed from the feelings that are occurring. Due to their logical approach and the amount of focus required, they often enjoy working alone.
Doing	When the Doing learning style balances Feeling and Thinking, they use practical and active responses to assess situations based on their technical analysis and experience with different solutions. They excel in integrating task and people needs.	They may want to implement solutions too quickly without enough time to consider and reflect on other possibilities. They may also have a practical response to a problem and wish to move beyond it while other learning like thinking will want more time to consider the issue.
Experiencing (Feeling)	When the Feeling learning style balances Acting and Reflection, they are deeply involved in the concrete experiences (of themselves or others) while being comfortable with the inner world of reflection and the outer world of action. They have a natural feelings barometer and easily tune into a full spectrum of life experiences. They appreciate hands-on experiences, pairs, triads and small group discussions that have a mutual connection with others that involves sharing about self or listening to others.	Because they often place the least attention on conceptualising they may lack planning, appear disorganized and be less likely to articulate theories to guide them. When someone is very strong in feeling, they can find themselves flooded by their or others' feelings and experiences and this interrupts learning until these underlying issues are addressed. These issues are often about unaddressed power and conflict.

Principle three: change of context can involve a change of dominant learning style

Learning is contextual. The dominant learning style may shift as the learning task changes or over lifespan development. Someone with a strong Doing learning style may become more of a 'watcher' as they age due to the wisdom they have gained, a heightened awareness of

their own strengths, or their experience of observing others completing a task. Change in dominant learning styles is mainly based on familiarity and confidence.

Principle four: as a group leader, balance the use of all four learning styles

Group leaders operate best when they balance the use of the four learning styles in group processes and activities. While all participants will benefit from involvement in the processes below, the conscious integration of all the following processes is most desirable:

<p>FEELING</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop a good group atmosphere Create a secure and safe feeling Allow an opportunity for group members to share with others in small groups, dyads or triads Validate the acceptance of the unknown Allow for the stimulation of new ideas and perspectives Ensure that the expression of feelings and emotions is valued as okay Allow for the use of humour and levity Allow time and space to reflect and tune in to feelings 	<p>WATCHING</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide diverse, varied and flexible activities Be energetic Use visual multi-sensory tools Model techniques, examples and the use of role-play Provide choices and options Allow for discussions to occur Provide opportunities to put ideas into practice Develop confidence first before practising Demonstrate skills and ideas through the use of multi-media
<p>THINKING</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Highlight what the session involves Provide clear aims and objectives Provide guidelines, outlines Use references to explore relevance and validity of ideas Allow for group members to question and challenge the ideas and information Provide useful reading material Use handouts, but not too many Allow time for group members to think about what has been said Allow group members to clarify ideas 	<p>DOING</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide tasks and activities Use warm-up exercises Provide variation in the type of group exercises Use experiential learning exercises Maintain a practical focus Provide clear opportunities for involvement Use demonstrations Utilise art, collage, drama, sculpture, games, role-play, video, drumming, small groups, puppets, guided meditation Integrate reflection and action Ensure the session is enjoyable

Principle five: watchers and wisdom are closely connected

The Reflection (Watching) learning style is central to the learning process. A true watcher fully integrates all the other learning styles as long as they do not procrastinate or have this as their shadow side. Building on Freire’s work (1992), transformative learning is driven by the dialectic between *reflection* and *action*. Using principle three, this is driven by the full integration of Thinking, Doing and Feeling learning styles.

In group work it is important to know who are your watchers. If a problem or crisis occurs, often the watchers are able to reframe the situation in a more balanced and wise way. Their response will be important for the best management of the situation. Their response is vital as the thinker’s shadow-side will over-intellectualise, the doer’s shadow side will probably want to move too quickly onto the next activity and the feeler’s shadow side will often be flooded by emotion.

Principle six: it is important to balance learning styles when strongly expressed

When the dominant learning style is over-used, it is useful for the group leader to stimulate the alternative dialectic learning style dimension, as their shadow-side is under-expressed.

Over-used learning style	Alternative dialectic dimension	Useful questions or statements for the group leader to use
Reflecting (Watching)	Doing	How about we stand-up and walk around the group and speak aloud the thoughts that are going through our heads? If you were to do five things you could do in response to what has been occurring today, what would they be? (Ask them to choose different group members to express one of these.) Put words to what your (name a specific part of your body) is saying right now. (Use when a specific part of the body is being expressive, e.g., clenched fist, bouncing foot.)

Thinking	Feeling	Point to the part of your body that expresses what you are feeling right now. Describe what that feeling is like. Are these feelings new or have you been experiencing them for a long time?
Doing	Watching	As you have been watching what has been occurring, what does the group need to focus on now? (reflective focus) What do you notice is important about what is occurring right now? How would you describe the visible or invisible dynamics (issues) that are occurring in our group?
Experiencing (Feeling)	Thinking	What are the thoughts that you are having right now? How do you understand what is happening? Are these ideas new or have you been considering them for a long time? What are some of the steps you might consider need to happens next? (contemplation focused) Are your beliefs about this situation useful or not useful? Would you classify your beliefs as positive or negative self-talk? Who in the group believes that [person's name] will get over this? What other beliefs could you focus on that use less negative self-talk?

Principle seven: it is essential to slow people down to be reflective observers

Using principles three and five, reflection is a key point of initiation for learning to occur. This is echoed within the tradition of mindfulness and many other psychological tools. Mindfulness is identified as an awareness process rather than a thinking process. Its cornerstone is being conscious, watchful of the present moment (Harris, 2009). Like mindfulness, group work benefits from slowing down the learning process, where group members become more aware of their own experience, or what is happening within their body. As this is acknowledged, thoughts or ideas are attached to the experience and that then leads to how people respond in action. It is then that feelings

arise that reinforce what has been learnt. A key process to deepen the learning experience is to enable people to slow down and reflect on what they are more aware of using their five senses (sight, sound, feel, taste and smell).

This process can be encouraged as follows:

Ask a group of people in animated talk about the variety of feelings they are experiencing, ask them to recognise what actions (body language that accompanies this expression). This involves their body language, the need to speak about what is occurring, to voice their experience, to (overtly or covertly) respond to others who have similar or different experiences.

Then ask them to name what beliefs or ideas impact on this experience, what their beliefs or thoughts are about the situation. It may be possible to explore these as expressions of positive or negative self-talk.

Then ask them to locate in their body where they experience their discussion. It may be useful to explore this as being expressed somewhere in their body (head or chest), heart (values or other things that are important), mind (ideas) or spirit (culture, spirituality, ethics).

It is in this expression of the body that it is best defined as pleasant, unpleasant or a neutral experience (Analayo, 2006). This occurs before a thought, action and feeling are attached to the experience. An example of this may occur when someone is angry. They have already had the following experiences: they have experienced an unpleasant sensation in their body as it has tightened up; a thought has been attached to this – ‘I am being ignored because people think I’m stupid’; they have attached an action where their body shrinks and they speak more softly; this results in the person feeling angry towards themselves and passive-aggressive towards others.

To alter this experience, it is valuable to reverse the steps and move back through the ELC.

Principle eight: rebuild praxis by allowing reflection to occur, new thoughts to emerge and enabling actions

Once this awareness has been achieved, group members are conscious of their here-and-now experience. Thoughts are recognised as just being what they are – words or pictures. Then the ELC can be used to

move forward by recognising new thoughts (deeper values) that better define who individuals are; allowing enabling actions to be recognised that are more balanced with a person's values while learning from the challenges they face (not treating their fears and anxiety as a truth about themselves). It is then that more balanced feelings emerge that are responsive to the reflections.

All of these principles are demonstrated in the following scenario. While this is a verbatim account that has occurred, the names have been changed.

SCENARIO INVOLVING A GROUP SESSION

The group comprises eight fathers. Tom has been in the group for twelve months and has experienced a difficult separation process from his second partner. Participants have completed a written reflection regarding the issues they face within their life and how they have been addressing these issues. This segment occurred in week seven of an eight-week open discussion group where participants related issues arising in the week to what they were learning from other members. The group has a male and a female group leader.

Tom	<p><i>Tom is encouraged to read his written reflection on what he has gained from the fathers' group since he joined.</i></p> <p>I have been in this fathers' group for the past fourteen months. I have met some people who have touched my soul and have forever left their importance in my mind. The honesty and support that I have received from all people concerned has truly turned my life around. When I came to this group I had a major chip on my shoulder but listening to, and in some cases being there for others, has made me realise that even in the tough times my problems are not as bad as what I've made them out to be[...].Where can one start to begin about what I have learnt over this period of time? I am just overwhelmed; the thing that sits most with me is the fact that I have become a lot more patient, understanding and loving towards other people. I have stayed away from drugs and alcohol (except for a couple of hiccups) which makes me feel a much better person deep down inside. I have more control over my emotions and I have stopped judging other people and I value that all people and feelings can be accepted. I cannot say goodbye; I do not want to. I cherish these fathers' nights, to have people that I can talk to and relate to, just makes me feel good[...]</p> <p><i>The leaders, Ray and Bernadette, and a variety of other participants expressed their appreciation about the thought that Tom had put into the reflection. Ray, the male group leader, was aware that Tom, throughout his time in the group, had been more validating of his role with less validation towards Bernadette, the female leader. This is a familiar pattern for Tom that had existed since Bernadette joined the group. It was an issue that was discussed many times in the group without any significant change in Tom's behaviour.</i></p>
Ray	<p>What have you been learning from Bernadette about dealing with women in your life?</p> <p><i>Tom maintains a sarcastic and belittling relationship with Bernadette.</i></p>
Tom	<p>Bernadette and I have a love/hate relationship. We just like stirring each other.</p>
Bernadette	<p>Why do you keep putting this mask on and not valuing what I contribute?</p>
Tom	<p>You're the trainee!</p> <p><i>Tom uses a belittling voice</i></p>
Ray	<p>She is not a trainee; she graduated in a group leadership course some time ago. It is difficult for you to acknowledge this. Every time you speak to her you put on your 'tough boy voice'.</p>

Tom	What am I meant to say [<i>still speaking in a belittling voice towards Bernadette</i>] .I have a mask on for everyone. I don't lower my mask. I wear it all the time.
Ray	But you do lower it. A few minutes ago when you were speaking about your reflection, you lowered your mask. When you speak to me, a male, you don't use your belittling voice; you only put it on when you speak directly to Bernadette, who is the only woman in the group. [<i>Pause</i>]If you were going to say something to Bernadette without putting your 'tough boy voice' on, what would you say?
	Sitting silently in the chair looking very thoughtful for a few minutes. Some silence in the group. It was easily seen that Tom was battling to find this different response.
Peter	[<i>Another group member speaking to Tom</i>]. I can really identify with your discomfort and difficulty in doing this.
Ray	[<i>Speaking to Peter</i>] Where do you experience it?
Peter	[<i>Speaking to Ray while still concentrating on looking at Tom</i>]. In the chest and in the stomach. It is sometimes very hard to be honest. I have noticed in the past month, both Bernadette and you have been pushing and challenging us more, making sure we face these things.
Ray	That would be true. [<i>More awkward silence</i>]
Tom	[<i>Tom starts to speak, with his tone of voice being softer, more appropriate and honest.</i>] When Bernadette came into the group, there was a night when both of us had a talk during the break, and we talked about what we both want out of our respective relationships. The strange thing was we both wanted the same thing. We wanted a strong friend and companion. There was no sexual relationship tied up in it. It was someone who was just there. [<i>Pause</i>]That night I thought about that discussion a lot. I thought that it would be good to have Bernadette as a companion. Not with any sex involved, but as a companion. But then I thought, no we couldn't, she is the leader, it would complicate things. I then found it was easier to push her away, to give her a hard time.
	This all occurred near the end of the evening. The session concluded with several participants and the group leaders giving feedback to Tom and saying something of their own experience. Everyone's attitude to Bernadette changed after this evening.

The group has time to focus on the current issues that participants face in their life. To support this, learning needs to move from 'retrospective learning' to 'learning within the moment'. Tom knew it was hard for him to communicate honestly with women. He had regularly discussed these issues regarding his previous partners. The ability to use a real group experience to explore this issue allowed Tom's reflection to move from the past (hypothetical) to occurring in real time. However, it is difficult for group leaders to operate at this level, as 'learning in the moment' requires them to have confidence in working in the unstructured/unknown.

The following five processes allow group leaders to work more adequately in the unknown.

1. WORKING WITH THE WARM-UP

Group work can be viewed as similar to the process that an elite athlete goes through. Each person is keen to perform at his or her best in a short space of time. When facilitating a group, the leader warms up to the development of clear content, the development of useful questions that extend the learning and how the structured exercises can flow as evenly as possible. In the group, the leader warms up to the similarities and differences found in the relationships within the group. These relationships are linked to the issues people face in the rest of their life.

In the scenario, Tom commenced his warm-up adequately, allowing him to express his reflection confidently and clearly. All the other participants in the group appreciated his preparation. However Tom was still only warmed up to 'retrospective learning'. When Ray asked the question about what he had learnt from the female co-leader, who was sitting in front of him, he floundered. His default position in warming up was adopted, which meant he was sarcastic and flippant. Tom needed support to warm up to 'learning within the moment' allowing him to express himself directly to Bernadette.

Bernadette's warm-up to Tom's ambivalence was towards intellectually understanding 'why was this the case?' This, too, is a default position in warming up, adopted under pressure, and she too needed time to warm up fully to learning in the moment with Tom. Ray's and Peter's interactions allowed this new warm up to occur.

Peter's warm up was towards empathy for Tom's situation. He was the group member who typified a strong expression of the watching learning style (see principle eight of the ELC). He easily identified in his body where he experienced the discomfort. This meant that he understood the emotional challenge more clearly than Tom did at the beginning. His role in the group was very important in allowing Tom to re-warm up to the emotional content of what he had learnt from Bernadette. Through Peter's warm-up to watching, the other members were encouraged to do likewise.

Ray's warm up was to exploration, identifying themes and issues to be explored. Tom's lack of recognition towards the female co-leader was a good indicator that the reflection process was only half-complete. He was still too much in his head (thoughts) regarding his situation. The act of challenging his feelings regarding how he belittles Bernadette gave rise to an experience where something else could emerge. Through focusing on Tom's contradictory comment 'that he never takes down his mask', Ray highlighted that he already had revealed a significant amount of himself. Mirroring the belief that he was able to be open about his learning, Tom warmed up to the emotional element as displayed by Peter and responded adequately to Bernadette.

2. WORKING WITH THE PURPOSE (INTENT)

When participants enter a group learning situation they often express a 'safe' purpose or reason for being in the group. This is the broad description of why they are in the group. Often a secondary purpose lies below the initial purpose. The group leader needs to develop a cohesive and trusting environment to allow this purpose to be expressed. Unless the secondary purpose is addressed, the participant's attendance is going to be irregular.

Once expressed, this secondary purpose or intent provides the leader with the important clues about the areas of discussion that the group needs to address. Tom's secondary purpose was to develop cooperative relationships with the women in his life. His relationship with Bernadette was an excellent place to create 'learning in the moment' and practise less threatening ways of communicating with women.

At the beginning of a group, the leader needs to ensure they have a clear picture of the overt and secondary purposes which motivate people to attend the group.

3. WORKING WITH THE IMMEDIATE MOMENT

Learning within the moment is difficult. “Retrospective noticing often induces judgements, because the fact of not having learned from experience has meant that undesirable behaviour has taken place ‘yet again’” (Mason, 1993, p.120). When a person learns within the moment, they have the opportunity to immediately act differently. According to Mason, “there is a real freedom, perhaps the only real freedom, in just that one moment; the moment I am fully awake and alive to a possibility. If my attention is fully caught up in the task at hand, then there may be none left over to pay attention to the overall direction, to guide and monitor progress, to recognise opportunities to do other than react in habitual ways” (1993, p.120).

In the scenario, Tom spoke retrospectively about the past twelve months in an adequate way. However, when Ray brought Tom’s attention to what he had learnt from Bernadette he experienced some awkwardness and discomfort. This often occurs when people start ‘learning within the moment’. He had to increase the strength of his focus to find an adequate response to the immediate situation. It highlights the feelings that arise that are an expression of ‘learning in the moment’: ambiguity, uncertainty, frustration, boredom, confusion, mental exhaustion and physical discomfort (Burns, 1996).

4. WORKING WITH SYSTEMS THEORY

As we have discussed above, group leaders have multiple processes that they can use to create change within a group. The four process levels are (1) intrapersonal level, (2) interpersonal level, (3) group level (group-as-a-whole), (4) intergroup (sub group) level (Gillette & McCollom, 1990). Each level allows the group to learn through a different range of understandings and interventions. Different types of

groups use different processes. This scenario demonstrates how group leaders use systems theory to work more effectively:

The **intrapersonal level** assumes that behaviour changes occur due to the internal processes of the individual. Behaviour modification approaches or psychodynamic theories can be used to highlight these processes. In the scenario, the group leaders could have focused on Tom's life experience that resulted in his mistrust of women. Alternatively, the focus could be the consequences of Tom having such a perspective and coaching him on how to respond differently.

The **interpersonal level** refers to member-to-member relations. Change occurs due to the quality and type of relationships that exist between the participants, the communication patterns, information flow, level of trust/conflict and relating styles between participants (Gillette & McCollom, 1990). Participants obtain direct feedback about the effect that their communication style has on others, allowing for the exploration of passive, aggressive or assertive behaviours. The meaning obtained through this process is then applied to participant's own family life situation.

In the scenario, Bernadette was open to exploring the difficulty that Tom had with her (Box4). This is one possible useful approach, which meant that Ray was cutting across the interaction in making his comment (Box6). However, since Bernadette's warm-up was towards intellectualising (asking the question 'why?' it was likely that Tom would remain elusive and dance around the answer (as demonstrated in Box5.)

Ray used the interpersonal level in the first half of the scenario by giving Tom feedback about the behaviour that he demonstrated. Box6 contained the phrasing as a statement rather than a question. The purpose of these comments was to ensure that Tom recognised that he was able to be reflective and honest about the issues affecting his life. This resulted in Tom warming up to the situation and being able to give a more appropriate response. Bernadette likewise warmed up the new appropriate responses made by Tom, and reciprocated (Box14).

The **Group level (group-as-a-whole)** processes assumes that group behaviour and change occur as part of a social system and that individual behaviours are indicators of shared behaviours that other people in the group also experience. It is possible the participants' behaviours are seen as a vehicle through which the group expresses its life. The normalisation processes and community building occur

predominantly through this process. Individuals move from a place of isolation to the recognition that other people share their same issues and concerns. This process is a significant strength within groupwork.

In the scenario, other participants also experienced Tom's issue, and avoided the discussion of the issue. In the debriefing period, other participants identified the issue that holding back their appreciation towards Bernadette was also relevant to their family relationships.

In Box 10, Ray momentarily shifted the focus to Peter who was aware of the same issue. He was more open to expressing his feelings than Tom. This shift intensified Tom's warm-up to 'learning in the moment'. Through the use of silence, (the issue was not going to glossed over and forgotten), Tom expressed in Box 13a variety of feelings and issues that no one in the group had previously taken the opportunity to express. This was relevant not only to Tom but was also an issue for many of the other participants. Working within the group-as-a-whole level allows individual needs to be addressed, as well as the normalising of shared experiences with other participants.

5. WORKING WITH THE EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING CYCLE

The scenario highlighted how a significant change can emerge in the types of feelings expressed within the group. When the group has a strong expression of negative dynamics, it is important for the group leader to challenge this and its relevance to the group members' lives. Rather than focusing on why he felt that way towards Bernadette (this discussion had occurred in past sessions), Ray challenged Tom by acknowledging an unspoken action he regularly use – his 'tough boy voice'.

This challenge caused Tom to consider the use of this response and whether or not it was helpful in the situation. It was in Box10 that the group significantly changed. Using the other group members and the whole system, Ray shifted the focus to Peter and to his experience as a watcher who was courageous enough to respond to Tom. By focusing on Peter's experience, the watcher learning wisdom refocused the emphasis of the group discussion. It moved from a mixture of useful and less-useful feelings to awkward and misdirected warm-up interactions to challenging gendered assumptions and belief systems to

enabling group members to be more aware of what they were experiencing in their body. This is Kolb's ELC in action in group work!

With the aid of silence, Box13 allowed for the expression of new thoughts, actions and feelings to emerge that were a lot more accurate and valuable in their situation. This is principle eight in action. Kolb's ELC provides a strong framework to increase a group leader's confidence to move back and forward in exploring a range of useful responses for the situations people face in life.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has highlighted the significance of the role of group leaders in community services, relationship and health contexts and how that may differ from the expectations of a facilitator. A group leader uses a higher level of intervention skills than expected to take a position, when what is occurring in the group is different to the health and wellness outcomes that are required through participation in the group. While the facilitation role informs partially what is required of a group leader, it is essential that organisations and funders do not view facilitation and group leadership as synonymous.

The three highlighted issues significantly inform group leadership in the twenty-first century. These issues are the group leader's application of:

- Intent – Active use of yourself as a change agent through utilising your values, ideas, reflections and responsiveness using empathy.
- Application of systems theory – The leader provides a framework to support change alongside the process of facilitation.
- Active use of experiential learning cycle thereby purposely slowing down the learning cycle stages to respond differently to changes that people may experience.

The group leader plays a significant role within the group in understanding the group behaviour through referring to intrapersonal, interpersonal, group-as-a-whole and intergroup levels of change. To achieve a group that is more creative and spontaneous in developing and accepting new ideas/responses, the group leader needs to use an integrated blend of the responses above.

‘Learning in the moment’ is difficult but easy to achieve. It is intense but also playful and light. Mastering these paradoxes allows a group leader to move easily between ‘retrospective learning’ and ‘learning in the moment’. For participants, the experience of this learning process is demanding but delightful, and they would never wish to miss the opportunity to be involved.

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