

Do no harm: Equipping facilitators for competent practice

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A key component of programme effectiveness is attributable to those at the delivery end of the business. Having facilitators properly skilled to deliver interventions with integrity is the fourth plank (the others being programme design, context and participant responsivity) in the platform of what is thought to be critical in reducing reoffending to enhance community safety. The focus of this chapter is on how to equip facilitators to be both confident and competent in delivering programmes to those who offend. Embedded in this question is the notion of ‘competency clusters’ that include skill and knowledge to help facilitators deliver programmes with integrity. Integrity is at the centre of professional practice.

The chapter explores three key ideas. First, the current pedagogical shifts that impact on how we deliver training to facilitators; second, the range of competencies we would expect facilitators to have when they enter the room with a group of people who offend. Evidencing core competencies is a requirement of best practice in most jurisdictions, to ensure that offenders are not worse off for the experience; to ensure that risk is de-escalated rather than escalated and that facilitators themselves are safe. Finally, we use our own experience to describe how blended learning solutions can maximise skill and knowledge acquisition to make the most of in-room training time. This links back to new thinking about pedagogy, which we now take up.

The changing nature of training — or should that be learning?

Pedagogy, or the theory of learning, has changed rapidly in the past ten years.¹ The ability to adapt to rapid change within organisations requires staff to show cognitive and behavioural flexibility. We have seen greater emphasis on generic and soft skills over more technical ones, as it is argued that these skills better equip workers for changes in organisations.² These changes may be outlined as follows:

- There is a shift from teaching to learning as the focus.
- Consequently, there is a greater focus on work and workplaces as significant sites for learning.
- There is greater emphasis on vocational outcomes that move beyond the acquisition of technical skills and competencies to outcomes that explicitly seek to change how people engage with work.
- Learning is viewed less as attaining particular items of knowledge and more as a continual process of ideas and skill renewal, and therefore workplaces are seen as significant sites for development. This allows for promotion from within, which provides a strong return on investment.³
- Learning is a lifelong endeavour, and workplaces have a role in supporting personal and professional development.
- Blended learning solutions best meet the needs of flexibility in workplaces, which are often under pressure fiscally as well as being time-poor.

In summary, contemporary approaches can best be described as learner-centred, work-centred and attribute-focused. Learners are seen as active agents in their own learning, not merely recipients of other people's knowledge. The workplace provides the most 'authentic' place for learning, and the best we can do for learners is to give opportunities to acquire skill sets that are transferable across fields of practice.

1 Sloman 2007.

2 Robinson 2011.

3 See Collins 2001.

Adaptability is now recognised as a core function of learning and development. Workers are part of the knowledge economy, which carries an expectation that they will maintain fluency with contemporary, evidence-based knowledge to inform best practice. In the Corrections field we have seen the explosion of new ideas informing interventions. These include dialectical therapy,⁴ good lives models,⁵ motivational enhancement approaches,⁶ strength-based approaches⁷ and solution-based approaches.⁸ These sit alongside the staple approaches generated out of cognitive-behavioural approaches.⁹

Before exploring how to best equip facilitators, we need to step back and ask the question, what is learning? There is general agreement that four main traditions of learning theories have been most influential since the Second World War.¹⁰ These traditions are:

- learning as behaviour
- learning as understanding
- learning as knowledge construction
- learning as social practice.

These traditions are informed by three philosophical approaches — behaviourist, cognitive and constructivist — which mix and converge in various ways. Each approach brings a suite of pedagogical practices that are drawn on in designing learning opportunities.

Behaviourism, for example, underpins most skill-based development through strategies such as demonstration, skill rehearsal, reinforcement and positive feedback, while the closely related cognitive approach encourages the active mental processing of people's ideas, focusing on both core and automatic thoughts that emerge in response to situational factors. Strategies to promote learning that spring from cognitive theory focus on understanding and eliciting people's 'cognitive maps' and helping to reconstruct information without the inherent restraints of their old 'maladaptive schemas'. Freed from the power of these

4 Linehan 1993.

5 Ward & Stewart 2003.

6 McMurrin 2004.

7 Lehmann & Simmons 2009.

8 de Jong & Kim Berg 2008.

9 Bandura 1977; Beck 1995; Bush 1995.

10 Sloman 2007.

schemas, people are able to view their existing knowledge in different and fresh ways.

Augmenting these pedagogical strategies, which might be viewed as trainer-led, are constructivist approaches whereby learners individually and socially construct meaning. Dewey, Piaget and Vigotsky have been the main proponents of these approaches. Learning tasks are embedded in 'real-world' experiences and draw forth a range of strategies, including small group work, problem solving, discussion and debate, researching and presenting ideas, learning quizzes, information sharing, mentoring and modelling. In the field of adult learning there is an assumption that learners have foundational or prior learning on which they can build. This engages the learner from a point of competence, and allows for the matching of learning needs.

Identifying key skill sets for programme facilitators

Intervention has become more complex in the past 20 years. From the psycho-educational approaches popular from the 1980s to the turn of the century there has been a move to greater therapeutic engagement across areas of intervention with those who offend. At no other time has there been the number of theoretical models to choose from in deciding best intervention practice.¹¹ This challenges facilitators in how to blend multiple models meaningfully in a group context. The facilitator needs greater mindfulness skills in both reflecting and applying interventions to ensure group participants can integrate learning into alternative cognitive position-taking, which ultimately translates into behaviour change.¹² Below are two examples of behavioural-based competencies used to accredit programme facilitators in a government agency and a community-based agency. What is most noticeable is the commonality across organisations.

The New Zealand Department of Corrections has identified the following core competency areas that facilitators need to achieve accreditation as programme facilitators.

- self-management (professional behaviour)
- facilitation of group learning programme

¹¹ Ward & Stewart 2003; McMurrin 2004; Andrews & Bonta 2006.

¹² Yalom 2005.

- delivery of programme content as prescribed programme
- application of theoretical concepts
- working with Maori values, concepts and processes
- working with Pacific values, concepts and processes
- co-facilitation
- management of programme relationships
- programme organisation.

The National Network of Stopping Violence Services/Te Kupenga Mahi Whakaoti (NNSVS/TKMW) uses the following competency criteria for accrediting workers to run programmes under the Domestic Violence Act 1995. The programme worker:

- can establish an appropriate working relationship with men who take part in Stopping Violence programmes, taking account of individual differences and the cultural and social context
- can facilitate a group environment that establishes a relationship with participants, taking into account their individuality, culture and social background
- demonstrates knowledge of the philosophical, theoretical and practice issues around stopping violence and abuse
- demonstrates an awareness of self, non-violence and safety for self and others
- demonstrates an ability to perform and understand Best Practice(s) in stopping violence and violence intervention strategies, as required by the agency
- demonstrates co-facilitation skills.

Drawing together the common themes that emerge from these criteria, an effective facilitator is somebody who: can use therapeutic group-work skills to engage with participants across gender, ethnicity and motivation levels; has a sound understanding of theoretical approaches that underpin practice; can implement the programme design with integrity; sets an example of self-insight and ethical behaviour; can

maintain professional boundaries; and can operate programmes in the context of organisation structures.

Accreditation of intervention staff has become an important aspect of agency approval processes (e.g. Domestic Violence Act, 1995, Programme Regulations). For NNSVS/TKMŪ, for example, one of the standards facilitators are required to meet is: ‘The programme worker can establish an appropriate working relationship with men who participate in Stopping Violence programmes in a way that takes account of individual differences as well as the cultural and social context’. When this standard is met the facilitator will be able to demonstrate the following:

- understanding of gender issues
- clarity of personal values
- acknowledgment of biculturalism and the Treaty of Waitangi
- understanding of the actions, functions, roles used in groups
- understanding of and ability to perform roles that address task needs, individual needs and maintenance/process needs.
- behaviour appropriate in differing groups
- understanding and demonstration of non-hierarchical behaviours
- understanding of the culture of masculinity and femininity
- understanding the concepts of privilege, entitlement, power and control
- knowledge of the impact of violence on others.

In essence, facilitators are required to meet a high standard of professionalism in their work, underpinned by their own effective personal learning and development to ensure safe practice.

A case study — increasing competency in stopping violence programme facilitators

In 2009 NNSVS/TKMŪ and Relationship Services asked us to design a training package for workers throughout New Zealand delivering family violence intervention. An interesting challenge for this work

was that the organisation did not have great resources for training, had a widely dispersed workforce and a variety of competency levels (from new through to very experienced facilitation staff).

Our approach was to design a blended learning system that allowed self-paced, pre-workshop, interactive tasks related to evidence-based theory and conceptual and knowledge aspects of facilitation skills. A series of two-day workshops (three altogether) were based around the following design framework:

1. Assess and agree on their training needs
2. Create and develop training specifications
3. Consider the learning styles of the participants
4. Plan the training design and delivery
5. Design materials, methods and delivery methods.

In considering the range of skills facilitators need to operate competently, we identified six areas for the curriculum: background knowledge, group-work skills, motivational interviewing techniques, intervention skills, advanced intervention skills and assessment skills. Table 4 outlines the content for each area.

The first module sets the scene for working in family violence practice. This module was designed for those new to the field of facilitating family violence intervention, was totally self-paced and focused on tasks both inside and outside the workplace. Each area had sub-tasks, which included agency visits to other organisations working in the field, online material on recent campaigns, interviews with more experienced workers and so on. The other modules are a combination of self-paced work and workshop. Participants chose how they could best work through the modules.

We have put this material into our Moodle online medium rather than as a static download version, to enable more interactivity with learners.¹³ This will form the basis of a certificate course in Family Violence Intervention Work, which at the time of writing is moving for New Zealand Qualifications Authority accreditation.

¹³ The Moodle Virtual Learning Environment (www.moodle.org) is a course management system popular among educators around the world as a tool for creating dynamic web sites for their students.

Table 4: Learning curriculum

<i>Module title</i>	<i>Self-paced content</i>	<i>Learning outcomes</i>
Module 1: Knowledge	Activity 1: Getting started Activity 2: Understanding violence within families Activity 3: History of interventions in family violence Activity 4: Impact of violence on those victimised Activity 5: Impact of violence on children Activity 6: Pathways into violence Activity 7: Changing attitudes that support family violence	<i>Note no in-room content for Module 1</i> <i>Expanded content for Activity 3: History of interventions in family violence</i> 3.1 Watch the video clip ‘We’ve come a long way’ in which Ken McMaster describes the history of interventions within New Zealand around stopping violence work. 3.2 Read chapter ‘Current approaches to working with family violence’ by Ken McMaster and Daryl Gregory and answer the key questions on Activity 3.2 questions. 3.3 Interview the coordinator from the local Stopping Violence Programme using Activity 3.3 discussion questions to prompt conversation. 3.4 Read the article titled, ‘I hear she is as abusive as him!’ in Activity 3.4 and answer the questions. 3.5 Scan the most up-to-date statistics on violence in Aotearoa/New Zealand — think about what this means to the many families, whanau, aiga in our communities for Activity 3.5.
Module 2: Working with family violence groups	Activity 1: Facilitation skills Activity 2: Life cycle of groups Activity 3: Adult learning principles Activity 4: Managing challenging behaviour	Describe the seven stages of the life cycle of groups Describe the tasks for the facilitator and the tasks for the participant at each of the seven stages. Demonstrate the key skills of therapeutic group work. Demonstrate a range of skills to manage challenging group behaviour. Demonstrate skills to manage responsiveness barriers. Identify ways to support and uphold the status/mana of a co-facilitator.

Table 4: Learning curriculum (continued)

Module 3: Motivational interviewing skills	Activity 1: Motivational interviewing background ideas Activity 2: Motivational questioning techniques	Describe the key principles that underpin motivational interviewing approaches. Use open questions to elicit depth of information. Undertake a cost–benefit analysis. Undertake a motivational interview with a client. Shift resistance by focusing on the stage of change.
Module 4: Practice skills in working with family violence	Activity 1: Understanding thinking Activity 2: Offence mapping and relapse prevention skills	Understand and work with cognitive behavioural ideas, including mapping abusive practices. Spot a distortion and effectively intervene. Understand where core beliefs come from and how to work with them. Work to help clients regulate mood states.
Module 5: Core assessment skills	Activity 1: Assessment template and structure	Basis of assessment Formulations Assessing risk, need and responsivity Strength-based assessment processes
Module 6: Ongoing practice skills	Activity 1: Problem solving Activity 2: Co-facilitation practice	Form functioning co-facilitation relationships Reflecting on group practice Dealing with complex needs.

Using blended learning to support a learner-centred approach to continuing professional development

To maintain their knowledge of best practice, facilitators need support with development approaches that match their working environment and professional lives (which are mobile, flexible, fast and ever-changing). We can no longer rely on the comfort of the classroom or moving groups to where the ‘experts’ operate, as the sole way to

support their learning process. Instead we need to use delivery methods that are flexible and mobile yet still support effective learner-centred pedagogical approaches.

Blended learning solutions help us support such approaches. The term blended learning has several definitions, depending on the context in which it is used.

Blended Learning is learning that is facilitated by the effective combination of different modes of delivery, models of teaching and styles of learning, and founded on transparent communication amongst all parties involved with a course.¹⁴

Here we are talking about the facilitation of learning supported through different delivery modes — face-to-face in a classroom, coaching session or online through the dissemination of digital learning resources and the use of asynchronous communication tools. A programme can be a mixture of self-paced and online group collaborative learning and face-to-face sessions. Formative assessments can be done on the job as learners complete online journals, while summative assessments can be done through the online submission of papers or even online ‘tests’ on the ground that has been covered.

Using the open-source Moodle Virtual Learning Environment we have been able to set up a comprehensive and cost-effective online learning environment. Our learners are provided with an account to use the online environment and can access the resources we have uploaded when and where they have access to the internet. Moodle also offers online collaborative communication tools, which means participants can continue their discussions, sharing experiences and reflections when they are back on the job. However, despite the increasingly user-friendly technologies, there are many challenges in moving to this model of development.

For designers and facilitators of professional development programmes, the mixture of face-to-face and distance learning supported by information technologies brings new demands. The design of digital learning resources and self-paced activities that can be successfully accessed online and motivate learners is a new discipline. The removal of physical cues and the dynamic interactions experienced in a classroom setting mean that a different set of skills to support learners must be

14 Heinze & Proctor 2004, p 10.

adopted. In fact, to be good online facilitators we need to be good online learning designers and vice versa.

To give our learners the best possible experience online we need to move into a 'learning-centred' mode of thinking.¹⁵ The design of an online learning environment, developing activities and content that inspire and support the learner, is both an art and a science. Online courses often lack the ongoing 'learner-tutor' dialogue that comforts and provides confidence and signposts to learners. We should never assume the learner knows what to do, when and why.

Although adults fare better in situations where there is more ambiguity, it should not be assumed that structure is unnecessary. When working online, not providing structure and leaving things to chance can mean the demise of the course.¹⁶

We need to visualise the learning experience for our distant learners. How will they follow their learning journey? What content will they access, how will they show their thought processes and what roles will people have during specific activities? Our role is to craft the environment most likely to create an engaging learning experience, while ensuring learning outcomes are achieved. In a blended course it could be some time before we see our learners, and the visual cues normally picked up in the classroom (he's struggling, she's confused, etc) are not there. We can't predict everything that will happen in a distance learning situation. However, we can ensure learners are supported, have the necessary resources and environment and a rich, enjoyable learning experience that impacts positively on their future.

As learning designers we should try to ensure that all the useful and productive social, interactive, dynamic and enjoyable aspects of working with peers, communicating with tutors and being engaged are the same for online learning as for face-to-face learning. In some ways, the online learning experience can be enhanced, with more opportunities for individual learners to reflect and contribute when the engagement is asynchronous (at different times) rather than synchronous (at the same time); the shy learner can often blossom online.

Blended learning has an impact on the nature of our role as facilitators of learning. Zane Berge breaks down the role of the online facilitator

15 Anderson 2008, p 245–263.

16 Palloff & Pratt 2003, p 35.

into a set of recommended approaches, headed as ‘pedagogy’, ‘social’, ‘managerial’ and ‘technical’.¹⁷ Gilly Salmon’s five-stage model helps us to realise that facilitators often need to help learners through the technical barriers as a first stage to successful online learning.¹⁸

Managing groups of online learners and responding to their needs also requires excellent online communication skills and the ability to ‘humanise’ the environment. Furthermore, if we are truly to adopt the ‘guide on the side’ approach and foster a learner-centred model, facilitators should avoid the temptation to jump into online discussions between learners, just as we should in face-to-face situations. We need to promote a culture that recognises the benefits to adult learners of sharing their thoughts and experiences and the deeper learning that occurs as a result of this interaction. Collison *et al* write:

There is a strong tendency to ‘hop in’ with a practiced commentary or connection made from professional experience or one’s own training. On occasion, such interventions may be useful if the group is ‘wallowing in the shallows’ or meandering far from the track. In general, however, the craft of holding up participants’ own thoughts in a clearer or more layered form can achieve much longer-lasting personal development than the ‘added gem’ of a comment.¹⁹

Time management becomes extremely important to the online facilitator too, as learners access materials at all times of the day and night. Too often the principle of ‘guide on the side’ is misinterpreted to mean that learners can be left on their own. Online learners should feel the strong presence of the facilitator at all times. That does not mean you have to be online 24/7, nor does it mean you have to post every day. It’s important to set expectations with our learners at the start of the course, making clear when we will be available and how quickly learners can expect a response.

Learner challenges in moving to a blended mode of delivery

We also need to recognise that adult learners too face challenges moving to a blended mode of delivery. Offering professional development programmes means we reach out to learners of all ages, backgrounds

17 Berge 2006.

18 Salmon 2003.

19 Collison *et al* 2000, p 13.

and cultures. Many are not used to being taught and need guidance to 'learn how to learn'. Adopting an online distance-learning approach as part of the mix relies on learners to be more self-disciplined and motivated to learn.

Moisey and Hughes remark on our expectations that how a learner will behave in an online course is quite different from traditional education; '... the need for learners to become more independent, involved, and dynamic — actively seeking and using online information and supports ...'²⁰

As facilitators we need to put in extra effort at the start of a blended course to ensure learners do not become de-motivated by technical or access issues. Phone calls are often needed to talk new online learners through the access process. There is also a tendency, due to the dehumanising effect of technology, for us to forget about the cultural differences and learning styles of our learners.

All e-moderators need to develop a clear sense of their 'audience'... When e-moderating online it is easy to have a standard image in your mind of 'the students', but the best e-moderators manage to keep a sense of the composite needs of the group, along with those of a variety of individuals.²¹

Learning management systems that incorporate collaborative communication tools, such as Moodle, offer us the opportunity to build 'community' in our learning cohorts and address individual differences.

Including collaborative activity in an online course is probably the best way to tap into all learning styles present in the group.²²

Learners complement one another and check out their assumptions and pre-conceived ideas. This is important for the development of critical thinking skills. In groups they can also co-create knowledge and meaning. There is typically more reflection about a problem or task and the supporting resources when learners work in groups, which leads to deeper learning. Online reflection and sharing of those thoughts among peers can be a powerful reflective addition to the dynamic exchanges in the classroom.

20 Moisey & Hughes 2008, p 428.

21 Salmon 2003, p 110.

22 Palloff & Pratt 2003, p 36.

How the blended approach can be a powerful tool for professional development

For busy professionals or learners who simply need to study from home, blended learning offers the advantages of self-paced, online distance learning with opportunities for deeper learning through reflection and online collaborative activities, while using the scheduled face-to-face sessions to concentrate on dynamic skills building. A blended solution offers us as developers of facilitators the opportunity to provide learning programmes that support adult learning principles.²³

The introduction of the internet, and in particular Web 2.0 applications, means that professional educators have far more tools at their fingertips to support the learning process. More importantly, however, facilitators needing to up-skill can do so now without the need for great disruption to their work and personal lives.

Increasingly, social media and personal learning environments make it possible for facilitators to give evidence of their learning — in a variety of ways. Formal and informal learning opportunities are possible through a mixture of structured programmes combined with facilitators accessing their own ‘just-in-time’ information on the internet. E-portfolios, and online personal and collaborative spaces are becoming ubiquitous. So what does the future hold? Will professionals working in the Corrections field have their lifelong learning portfolio online? The opportunities are many and we have yet to rise to all of the challenges they bring.

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