**Singapore**

# The Many Co-operative Roles Available to Workshop Co-Facilitators

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Co-operation benefits education, whether it be student-student co-operation, teacher-teacher co-operation or other forms of co-operative interaction. This paper looks at co-facilitation in conducting workshops and argues that co-facilitators should be actively involved in planning, conducting and debriefing the workshops in which they are involved. The paper discusses twelve possible co-operative roles for workshop co-facilitators and explores some of these roles with reference to Humanistic Psychology, Social Interdependence Theory, Socio-Cultural Theory and Social Constructionism. The co-facilitator roles are: (i) planning the workshop, (ii) befriending participants, (iii) befriending the workshop facilitator, (iv) providing general assistance, (v) providing technical assistance, (vi) modelling behaviours and tasks, (vii) observing workshop processes, (viii) participating alongside participants, (ix) correcting and clarifying what facilitators have said and done, (x) sharing their own and participants' ideas, (xi) assessing the workshop's effectiveness and (xii) understudying the facilitator.

## Introduction

Students in classrooms can benefit when they co-operate with their peers and when their teachers co-operate together either by teaching together in the same room or by sharing ideas and then teaching separately. Similarly, participants in workshops can benefit when the workshop has co-facilitators helping the workshops' main facilitator. However, too often, the potential benefits of having co-facilitators are not achieved, as the co-facilitators are often limited to menial roles, such as distributing handouts. The purpose of this paper is to suggest and explain a variety of more substantive roles that co-facilitators can play. These roles are informed by four theoretical constructs that have influenced education — Humanistic Psychology, Social Interdependence Theory, Socio-Cultural Theory and Social Constructionism — and by the authors' experiences and reflections.

First, the terms 'workshop' and 'co-facilitator' require definitions. Unlike courses, which often last for weeks or months, workshops generally last no more than a few days or hours. Other short educational events, such as seminars, talks, lectures and symposia, emphasise presentations to audiences who largely spend their time listening, perhaps with a segment near the end of the event for questions. In contrast, 'workshop' implies that a significant amount of time is given over to participants to try out the concepts discussed. However, the line between workshops and these other short education events has been blurred somewhat by the increasing recognition of the importance of active learning (Bonwell and Eison, 1991).

Whereas courses are normally led by teachers, lecturers or instructors, 'facilitator' is the term often employed for those who lead workshops. Facilitator fits with the "guide on the side" nature of workshops, as opposed to the "sage on a stage" nature of talks and seminars. Occasionally, more than one educator plays the facilitator role in workshops. In such circumstances, one facilitator often takes the main role, although this may rotate for different segments of the workshop. In this article, the educator playing the main role is the facilitator, and the others are the co-facilitators.

## Theoretical Insights into the Roles of Co-Facilitators

When considering roles for workshop co-facilitators, insights from Humanistic Psychology

(Maslow, 1968; Rogers, 1961) focus attention on how facilitators can co-operate to benefit participants' emotional well-being, in particular, whether participants feel cared for. Feeling cared for includes such variables as whether participants feel a sense of emotional security, whether they feel a sense of belonging, whether they feel respected and whether they feel engaged and inspired by the workshops' activities and the overall atmosphere of the workshops. Higginbotham and Myler (2010) suggest that the best way for workshop facilitators and co-facilitators (hereafter, the workshop team) to show that they care for participants lies in planning and carrying out well designed and executed workshops.

When considering the impact of possible roles for workshop co-facilitators on group dynamics, insights from Social Interdependence Theory (Johnson and Johnson, 2006) can be useful in guiding co-operation among facilitators. This theory looks at how group members, such as groups of workshop participants, view each other. Do they feel as though their outcomes are positively correlated with the outcomes of fellow participants (positive interdependence), negatively correlated (negative interdependence) or not correlated (no interdependence)? In other words, do they want to help the other participants succeed in achieving their goals? Many workshops feature group activities and other opportunities for peer interaction. If the workshop team can successfully encourage participants to feel positively interdependent with other group members and others, these peer interaction opportunities are likely to be more productive and enjoyable.

Socio-Cultural Theory (Vygotsky, 1978) explains that learning is social and that language plays a crucial role in learning. Therefore, Socio-Cultural Theory fits well with Humanistic Psychology's emphasis on belonging and with Social Interdependence Theory's focus on group dynamics. Two concepts from Socio-Cultural Theory's emphasis on the social nature of learning that can inform the co-operative efforts of workshop co-facilitators are the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) and scaffolding. The ZPD focuses the workshop team's attention to whether workshop tasks are sufficiently challenging to engage participants yet not so challenging as to be beyond participants' capabilities if they have support from the workshop team and fellow participants. Scaffolding is the support provided to participants and then gradually removed as participants' capabilities, alone and in tandem with peers, increase. This scaffolding can be done not only by teachers, but also by peers.

Social Constructionism (Lave and Wenger, 1991) depicts the social processes by which ideas, artefacts and practices are generated and initially shaped, and are later modified and sometimes discarded. Whereas the typical workshop features a solitary workshop facilitator, co-facilitators bring the possibility of co-operation, as multiple minds focus on how to enhance the experiences of current and future workshop participation. Participants' input can also play a critical role in enhancing workshop effectiveness. However, too often, facilitator-participant communication suffers from a short time span and lack of two way communication. Thus, co-facilitators, as the other members of the workshop team, may be facilitators' best hope for co-operative input from workshop participants.

## Roles for Co-Facilitators

The following section of this paper presents roles that workshop co-facilitators might play in enhancing the value of the workshop.

### 1. Planning the workshop

Successful workshops often require many hours of planning. In the spirit of Social Constructionism, this planning may be more fruitful when done in partnership with co-facilitators who can bring their unique experiences and perspectives to the task. Furthermore, co-facilitators may have greater skills than facilitators in particular areas, such as preparing engaging PowerPoint presentations.

Co-facilitators should also be involved in planning the workshop because they function best when they are involved in planning and rehearsal. This enhances their feeling of ownership and their detailed understanding of the workshop. This planning includes deciding on and practising the roles the co-facilitators will play, including the division of labour if there are multiple co-facilitators. For example, each co-facilitator might be responsible for a particular group/ groups of participants.

## 2. Befriending participants

Often, workshop participants do not know each other, or even if they are acquainted, they do not have a strong working relationship. Therefore, when, as is often the case, participants form groups, group members lack rapport. This hinders feelings of belonging highlighted by Humanist Psychology. Ice-breaking / teambuilding activities seek to address this. To supplement such activities, co-facilitators can introduce themselves to participants and initiate conversations, either of the 'chit-chat' variety or more focused on the workshop content. These introductions and conversations can happen before the workshop begins, during breaks or after the workshop, as well as during activities and even in the days and months after the workshop.

One way in which co-facilitators can befriend workshop participants is what the Humanist psychologist Carl Rogers (1961: 283) called "unconditional positive regard", ie regardless of who participants may be, regardless of their performance in the workshop or their attitude towards the workshop, the workshop team continues to treat the participants in a welcoming, respectful manner. Another way of putting this is represented in the popular adage, "People don't care what you know until they know that you care".

High expectations form another aspect of positive regard. By displaying high expectations for workshop participants, the workshop team fosters an atmosphere that encourages everyone at the workshop to see themselves as part of a large team, a team devoted to promoting the common goals of the workshop. For instance, in the case of workshops for teachers, those goals might be enhancing the use of technology, encouraging co-operation among students or promoting thinking skills. If everyone in the room embraces those goals, the workshop no longer belongs to the workshop team. Instead, everyone adopts the motto of The Three Musketeers: "All for one; one for all". In other words, in the spirit of Social Interdependence Theory, everyone feels positively interdependent, ie their outcomes are positively correlated, and everyone needs contribute during and after the workshop for everyone's mutual goals to be achieved. Facilitators need to lead the workshop (both as it unfolds during its scheduled time and as it unfolds in practice back at participants' workplaces), co-facilitators need to help with this and participants need to learn, develop and apply the ideas explored during the workshop.

## 3. Befriending the workshop facilitator

Ripp (2010) describes teaching as a lonely profession, and her words can apply to workshop facilitators, as well. Palonsky (1986) likens teachers to entertainers, except that teachers (and workshop facilitators) not only have to keep their audiences entertained, they also need to provide audiences with ideas and techniques that can produce results back in their workplaces. In the face of this pressure to entertain and inform, plus the stress of staring out at a room full of unfamiliar faces, it is small wonder that workshop facilitators might feel lonely. Thus, the sense of belonging that Humanistic Psychology discusses can also be a need for facilitators, and the familiar presence of the co-facilitators, people with whom facilitators enjoy a feeling of positive interdependence, can be comforting. It is supportive to have someone there to gently inform facilitators that part of their breakfast is still decorating their upper lip or to kindly assure a facilitator that the workshop can succeed despite the fact that s/he forgot to bring the new version of the PowerPoint presentation which the workshop team had spent the whole night preparing. At the same time, facilitators should resist the temptation to spend break time, lunch time, etc solely with co-facilitators, and should instead seek to build a rapport with participants.

## 4. Providing general assistance

Co-facilitators can play a crucial role in implementing the two concepts from Socio-Cultural Theory explained above: ZPD and scaffolding. By providing assistance to participants, such as further explaining a concept or helping with a task, co-facilitators make what might otherwise be beyond participants' current skills into something that they can master with support, scaffolding and practice. Here, the key often lies in how co-facilitators assist participants. The temptation to take over from participants must be resisted. Instead, despite the omnipresent pressure of time, co-facilitators must guide students to help themselves or to learn from their peers. The slogan should be, "Give people a bowl of rice, and they eat for a day. Teach them to grow rice, and they eat for a lifetime". Thus, co-facilitators should be careful that participants do not depend too much on them. Some ideas for scaffolding are:

i. When using electronic devices, participants, not co-facilitators, operate the devices

ii. Participants are encouraged to think aloud as they do tasks, so that they, group members and co-facilitators understand what they are thinking

iii. Rather than telling participants what to do, co-facilitators use questions to help them discover what to do.

iv. If co-facilitators do part of a task for participants, the task is then done a second time, this time by the participants on their own.

In this same spirit of "guide on the side", co-facilitators should avoid becoming the centre of attention, or should occupy that space for as short a time as possible. One guideline to use here is '3+1 B4 T', ie when facing difficulties, participants should first seek help from their three group members. If group members are unable to provide sufficient assistance, participants should seek out another group before (B4) turning to a co-facilitator.

A benefit of the assistance co-facilitators provide workshop participants is that by supplying one-to-one or one-to-a-few assistance to workshop participants, co-facilitators significantly reduce the burden on the main facilitators' shoulders. Of course, in a well-designed workshop, based on a thorough needs analysis and careful selection of participants, less on-the-spot assistance will be needed, but such ideal preparation seldom occurs. Co-facilitators can also help integrate latecomers into the workshops.

## 5. Providing technical assistance

Participants may need help with such equipment as computers or digital pens. This technical assistance is a specialised case of scaffolding. Even with the clearest directions from the facilitator, some individual participants or groups may require such technical, rather than content, assistance. Heterogeneously grouping participants based on their ability with various equipment, such as basing groups on their familiarity with the software being used in the workshop, can reduce but may not eliminate the need for co-facilitator assistance. Without such assistance, valuable time can be lost and some workshop participants may fall far behind others.

## 6. Modelling behaviours and tasks

Co-facilitators can engage in another form of scaffolding by modelling the behaviours that the workshop team hopes to see in participants. These behaviours include showing interest in workshop activities and in what is being said and what appears on the screen, whiteboard, etc, for instance, laughing at the facilitator's jokes even when hearing them for the fifteenth time. In addition to modelling positive behaviours, co-facilitators can also seek to avoid negative behaviours, such as engaging in excessive side conversations and using their electronic devices, such as phones, for non-workshop activities.

Another way that co-facilitators can use modelling, involves demonstrating activities. Often, workshop activities are more successful if participants have seen a live demonstration. Co-facilitators can perform this role by modelling to all participants or to individual groups. Sometimes, demonstrating common mistakes can also be useful. Additionally, demonstrations can be narrated to highlight key points; for example, co-facilitators can think aloud as they go about a task.

### 7. Observing workshop processes

Facilitators often have difficulty monitoring what is going on with each participant or group of participants. Do participants understand what is being examined in the workshop? What do they find easy and difficult? Have they completed the task at hand? If so, have they done the task in a thorough, not a cursory, manner? Is more time needed? For instance, an individual or group may finish before the others because they did not complete the task in sufficient depth. Indeed, a quick finish may indicate little higher order thinking. For example, more proficient group members might finish a task and rather than explaining to their peers, they might let peers copy their work.

Such observational data are vital to the workshop team's social construction of the workshop as it unfolds during the event and as it is reviewed when the team reflects on the process afterwards. As co-facilitators are less occupied with the actual running of the workshop, they are better able to be the eyes and ears of the workshop team, unobtrusively observing how participants interact with the workshop input and activities.

### 8. Participating alongside participants

In addition to observing, co-facilitators can also join in alongside participants for all or part of the workshop. This arrangement has advantages. Firstly, one or more of the participants may need a partner for group activities. Secondly, by playing the role of workshop participant, co-facilitators gain a different perspective on the workshop and thus may be better able to assess the quality of the workshop. Participating co-facilitators can demonstrate enthusiasm for topics and activities, as well as modelling how tasks are to be done and responding themselves to the facilitator's request for input from participants.

### 9. Correcting and clarifying what facilitators have said and done

Workshop facilitators make mistakes, forget what they wanted to say and speak too quickly or too softly. Here, in the spirit of positive interdependence, co-facilitators can step in to keep the workshop on track. Often, participants may be reticent to go directly to the facilitators to point out what might be facilitator errors, to ask questions or raise concerns. Co-facilitators, perhaps due to the more personal contact with participants as well as to their physical proximity to them may be a more approachable sounding board for participants.

### 10. Sharing their own and participants' ideas

When participants engage in workshop tasks, how can their ideas and products be shared with participants elsewhere in the room? One way of doing this involves groups of two, three or four members sharing with other groups, which has the benefit of promoting peer interaction. Additionally, one group or individual can be asked to share with the entire room. One potential issue with both these ways of sharing is how any particularly good, useful idea developed by one person or a group can be identified so that it can be shared with everyone. One facilitator could have difficulty finding it, but the presence of co-facilitators increases the chances that an important idea will be unearthed, shared, refined and put to use. Furthermore, co-facilitators can share their own experiences and reflections on workshop topics.

### 11. Assessing the workshop's effectiveness

Just as classroom instruction benefits from frequent formative assessment (Stiggens, 2005), so too do workshop sessions. Many workshops conclude with a brief form of summative assessment. While not without value, such summative assessment has weaknesses. Firstly, at the end of a workshop, participants may be tired and eager to go home, resulting in only cursory attention to the assessment. Secondly, participants may see little value for themselves in an assessment instrument completed too late to be of benefit to them. In addition, the numerical and short answer formats typical of such instruments may not supply clear feedback. Finally, participants' responses on such instruments may be clouded by their personal feelings towards the facilitators.

Thus, formative assessment during a workshop can provide a more timely, more informative addition to summative modes of feedback. As mentioned above in the section on the co-facilitators' observer role, this formative assessment greatly benefits from the extra pairs of eyes and ears provided by the co-facilitators in the room. This formative assessment is focused on improving the workshop. Co-facilitators can record their observations and insights for later use, such as during a break or at a post-workshop debriefing session, when the workshop team can meet to decide if changes might be useful.

### 12. Understudying the facilitator

Facilitators usually play the lead role in a workshop due to their greater experience, expertise or reputation. However, the hope is that co-facilitators will learn from planning, observing and evaluating repeated iterations of the workshop, thereby preparing them to take on the lead role in future workshops. One scaffolded way to facilitate this is for co-facilitators to start by doing just a small part of the workshop, perhaps sharing the lead role with the facilitator. In other cases, the facilitators and co-facilitators may swop places in subsequent workshops or deliver different sections of a workshop. In these cases, what is being understudied consists more of the pedagogy of the workshop, rather than the content.

Final note: At workshops, it is often the case that some participants substantially exceed their fellow participants in terms of background on some or all of the workshop topics. In such cases, these more knowledgeable participants may be able to play some of the co-facilitator roles described above.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, the purpose of this paper has been to promote co-operation among educators, specifically, a larger role for co-facilitators in the conception, execution and assessment of workshops. The paper began with brief explanations of four theories that provide ideas for roles that co-facilitators might play, as the main facilitator and the co-facilitators co-operate to benefit workshop participants. Then, 12 possible roles were explained. Unfortunately, resources in terms of time and money mean that having workshop co-facilitators is often seen as not viable. The hope is that if co-facilitators play some of the roles explained in this paper, stakeholders will more fully appreciate their potential benefits and, thus, be more willing to devote the necessary resources to making co-facilitators a more regular part of workshops.

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