Performance as kinesis:
Facilitation and language teaching as activist performance

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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the concept of performance as kinesis and explores its relevance in language teaching classrooms. First, this paper examines the various assumptions in the theory and practice of group facilitation in teaching and training contexts. These assumptions, the author argues, are very much reflective of the values of the participatory approach, which practicing facilitators (including communication arts and language teachers), who may be often preoccupied with techniques, developing competencies and expanding their repertoire of skills, may just take for granted. The author, therefore, then suggests a rethinking of the principles and practices in leading group processes, that is, to view facilitation as performance as kinesis. Borrowing the concepts developed by Conquergood (1991, 1992, 1995, 2002) and Pelias & VanOosting (1987) in the field of performance studies, the author argues that this way of viewing group facilitation can enable teachers and trainers to reaffirm the culture of participation in their spheres of influence—the training event and the classroom. It can also allow these facilitators to be engaged and conscious of how they perform or create their social characters and to see students/group participants as responsible co-creators of content and process in the teaching-learning context. This perspective is significant in the 21st century as more facilitators are needed to develop critical citizenship among learners in a highly dynamic and complex world. Lastly, the author suggests ways on how this perspective can be applied to the English language/communication arts classroom, especially in the teaching of public speaking.

Introduction

"Performance is a communicative act embodying cultural norms and values. In this way, performance has the power to maintain cultural traditions and beliefs. Yet performance also has the power to transform culture. By stretching the limits of cultural expectations, by providing alternative visions, performance can bring about change."—Ronald Pelias, *Performance Studies: Interpretation of Aesthetic Texts*, 1992

The inevitability of the teacher's role as a facilitator in language arts classrooms has been well recognized in the area of English language teaching. This is most evident in articles that explore the concept of learner autonomy. For instance, Scharle & Szabo (2000, p. 5) note that "[a]s students begin to take charge of their learning, the teacher needs to take on the role of *facilitator* or counselor in

an increasing number (and type) of classroom situations" (emphasis supplied). McGrath (2000) notes that significant work has been done in describing the attributes and roles of teachers that seek to advance learner autonomy in the classroom. He particularly cites the work of Breen & Mann (1997), in which the following teacher attributes are identified: self-awareness as learner, belief and trust in learners' capacity to act autonomously, and genuine desire to foster autonomous development (McGrath, 2000, p. 102).

While there is considerable work done by language teaching scholars on the role of teachers as facilitators, it may be interesting to see what other fields have to say about the facilitation process and what perspectives or frameworks may be useful in putting facilitation into the teaching practice. This article explores what the other fields such as organizational development, training, and community development have to say about facilitation. These fields have done significant work in developing the concept of facilitation, which may be useful to teachers of language and communication arts who are interested in advancing learner autonomy. Specifically, this paper draws from scholarship in the humanistic field of performance studies (particularly from the works of Conquergood, 1991, 1992, 1995, 2002; Pelias & VanOosting, 1987), in order to explore the notion of facilitation as *performance as kinesis*. The author hopes to recontextualize this 'activist' notion within the communication arts and language classroom, especially the teaching of public speaking.

Facilitation: Assumptions and frameworks

Three basic assumptions on facilitation are very much intertwined with the variables that are present in group processes.[1] These assumptions, I argue, are shared by professional facilitators and language teachers who promote learner autonomy (see Sinclair, 2000; Hogan, 2002). The variables I am referring to include the group situation, group goal, roles, norms, and interpersonal influence (cohesion and leadership) (Beebe & Masterson, 1994). The first assumption is that *facilitation thrives in a situation where maximum participation is expected of every group participant*. When one facilitates a group, she assumes that a key role of participants is to be resource persons since participants have something to share—they are capable of identifying their problems, analyzing them, suggesting solutions, and deciding which solution is best and what can be the most effective way to implement the solution. The facilitator regards the participants as resource persons. Participants have many ideas because they themselves experience the dynamics of their group process. Needless to say, they are the ones who directly experience the issues and conflicts in the group. Facilitation's goal, then, is used to get these ideas from the members organized and to ensure that every member is involved in making informed judgments on these ideas.

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[1] The assumptions I mention here are drawn from my experience as a volunteer facilitator for NetWorks Inc., a non-government organization based in the Philippines that facilitates capability building activities among youth-oriented and youth-based groups using the participatory approach. The organization's ideas about facilitation and group processes are articulated in unpublished lecturettes that it has developed since its founding in 1997.

The second assumption is that *group participants essentially lead the group towards its destination*. Since the substance of the discussion comes from the participants, members are able to influence both each other and the direction of the discussion. The kind of leadership that the facilitator exerts is, at most, done in a form of help in making the group conscious of the act of direction-setting and in challenging the members to follow the direction that they have decided to take. The facilitator does not set the rules for the group. The most that the facilitator can do regarding rules is to provide instruction for activities that the members need to undertake for a future discussion. The instruction may be followed strictly or may be adjusted depending on the facilitator's grasp of the situation. Group participants set the group norms and rules, and the facilitator usually adjusts to these rules. This seemingly uneven set up may be addressed by setting the climate and a leveling of expectations at the start of the group activity.

The third assumption is that *the facilitator and group participants are considered co-learners in the group process*. The participants learn to be sensitive to the group process through the guidance of the facilitator while the latter gains insights through the experience of the group. The facilitator is never considered superior and should never consider himself one. At best, he should be self-effacing and should readily accept his dispensability should the group show its capacity to facilitate itself.

These assumptions can be better understood using the frameworks employed by professional facilitators. Hogan (2002) identified several models of facilitation developed by practitioners from the United Kingdom, United States, New Zealand and Australia. The first of these models was designed by John Heron, whose thesis on facilitation "invites facilitators to think about how they use and/or share power groups whether in 'hierarchical', 'cooperative' or 'autonomous' mode. It provides a lens that facilitators may use to analyze their approaches to power sharing" (p. 65). He adds that "[i]deally facilitators should be aiming at making themselves dispensable, culminating with a group being self-directing in autonomy mode" (ibid.).

The second model that Heron mentions is the International Association of Facilitator's (IAF) competency model: "The purpose of the model is to formulate both what facilitators value and what they do. There is a strong emphasis on professional growth, in terms of promoting the profession, standards of practice, and assessment procedures" (p. 67). This framework is evident in Brian Stanfield's article *Magic of the Facilitator* (1996), which identifies fourteen competencies that the author believes are prerequisite for the "creation of a culture of participation" or a "paradigm of human-to-human relations." The list includes skills in:
1. using core methods,
2. managing client relationship,
3. maximizing the event environment,
4. evoking participation and creativity,
5. affirming group wisdom,
6. maintaining objectivity,
7. reading the underlying dynamics of the group,
8. developing audience rapport,

9.   handling blocks in the process,
10. adjusting to changes in the situation,
11. assuming responsibility for the group journey,
12. producing a competent documentation of the process,
13. demonstrating authenticity, and
14. maintaining personal integrity.

The list identifies standard expectations from the facilitator in relation to the process (items 1, 3, 7, 9, 10, 12), to the group members or participants (items 2, 4, 5), and to himself (items 6, 8, 11, 13, 14). It is a manifestation that facilitation can be learned, but learning how to do it would require more than just a series of sessions or course work.

What this author considers a situation-based model is the one offered by a world-renowned trainer-consultant Sivasailam "Thiagi" Thiagarajan. In his *Secrets of Successful Facilitators* (1999), he noted that, based on interviews and field observations aimed at identifying "the secrets" of effective facilitation, there are no "consistent, common behaviors among these effective facilitators" (p. 1). He added that "[t]he same facilitator appeared to use different behaviors with different groups, even when conducting the same small-group activity. The same facilitator sometimes used different behaviors with the same group within the same activity at different times" (ibid.). To Thiagi, "the real secret of effective facilitators (is) buried within the apparent inconsistency." He concluded that facilitators are flexible, adaptive, pro-active, responsive, and resilient. Thiagi's insights do not subscribe to the idea that the facilitator should be skewed towards a definite set of behaviors in any group situation. To him, the facilitator should have a firm grasp of the situation if he is to become effective in handling the group (See Thiagi's article at http://www.thiagi.com/article-secrets.html).

The model developed in New Zealand by authors Dale Hunter, Anne Bailey and Bill Taylor "emphasize the need to make distinctions between purpose and culture. Their model takes into account the formal and informal influences of the external environment which impact on citizens from different cultures and organizations" (Hogan, 2000, p. 76).

Hogan used the "mindscape approach" in coming up with her own "living frame of facilitation" (p. 76). She used "a picture with metaphors to stimulate imagination and self-examination in a non-threatening way" (p. 76). The model, which Hogan admits has been interpreted and used in different ways, presents symbols and metaphors that relate to a variety of contexts, influences, purposes, values, and competencies that make up facilitation as a process. It appears as a composite of the earlier models in that it is holistic in terms of approach to facilitation. It takes into account the facilitator as a person; her external influences; the cultural, societal and organizational contexts of the process; the facilitator's cultural backgrounds, gender and experiences; her "higher purpose" for facilitating; her espoused theories and values; negotiations between theory and practice; life-long reflexivity; life-long learning; and the facilitators' growth phases (pp. 79-80). What I find interesting about Hogan's model is her emphasis on the need for the facilitator to be aware of her "higher purpose" or "deep-seated rationale for facilitating"—an idea which she adopts from authors Hunter, Bailey and Taylor (1999). I wish to extend this thesis in this paper and argue that the

higher purpose of facilitation is to provide critical interventions for social change using the participatory approach.

While the models presented above are helpful in understanding the complex process of facilitation, most of them tend to suggest neutrality in the doing actual facilitation work. At best both competency and situation-based models view the facilitator as a guide, which may be necessary as far as enabling learners to articulate themselves is concerned, but may not be enough to provoke them to challenge problematic assumptions in their immediate and remote contexts. Hogan's suggestion for the facilitator to be more aware of her "higher purpose" may be seen as a departure from the neutrality of earlier models as it invites self-reflexivity. It can, however, be viewed as a highly individualistic undertaking and has the tendency to apotheosize the role of the facilitator, which earlier models have tried to resist.

At this point, I would like to suggest another way of viewing facilitation in that this perspective stresses that facilitation is not a neutral act; it is value laden. Hogan herself recognizes this when she wrote:

> Everything occurs in a context: the context of group, organization, community and society. Facilitators are accountable to think about and take these layers into consideration. Everything we do is also value-laden. Facilitators are not value-free. By encouraging all members in a group to speak facilitators are valuing the input of everyone no matter what their status, experience or expertise. Facilitation has grown out of the bottom-up change process to create a more civil society and sustainable world (2000, p. 55)

Indeed, the facilitation is itself a choice. It is a choice to go against the grain of didactic teaching and the banking method (Freire, 1972). It is a deliberate choice to reaffirm the humanity of group participants. Why this is so and why this is significant can be appreciated by viewing facilitation as *performance as kinesis*.

Facilitation as performance as kinesis

Performance, according to Conquergood (1992), can be seen in three ways: *mimesis*, *poiesis* and *kinesis*. Performance as *mimesis* is inspired by the works of dramaturgical theorists like Erving Goffman that "gave currency to the notions of role-playing and impression management" (p. 84). He notes that "the ultimate effect of (the) dramaturgical theory was to reproduce the Platonic binary opposition between reality and appearance, and thus sustain an anti-performance prejudice" (ibid.). Performance as *poiesis* is inspired by the notion that performance is "making not faking". Conquergood acknowledges the role of Victor Turner in advancing this view. In his landmark essay, *Rethinking Ethnography: Towards a Critical Cultural Politics*, Conquergood (1991) explains that Turner "subversively redefined the fundamental terms of discussion in ethnography by defining humankind as *homo performans*, humanity as performer, as a culture-inventing, social performing, self-making and self-transforming creature" (p. 358). He credits Turner for asserting that performance events and processes are the very stuff and heart of culture, a notion that, according to him, set the stage for a more politically urgent view of performance—that which regards performance as *kinesis*

or as "breaking and remaking" (1992, p. 84). Here, he adopts Homi Bhabha's use of the term "performative" and "performativity" to refer to "discursive acts that insinuate, interrupt, interrogate and antagonize powerful master-discourses that he dubs 'pedagogical'" (p. 84). It is through this view that facilitation will be examined.

The notion of performance as kinesis is reflected in the new conceptions of performer as a social activist and ethnographer (and vice versa) (Conquergood, 1992, 2002), of the performance event as any space and time where meaning is negotiated, and the audience as pro-active agents of change (Pelias & VanOosting, 1987). This notion breaks the traditional boundaries of what *acters* and audiences can do and where they can hold and witness performances.

Using such perspective, the facilitator, who is a special kind of performer, can be seen as a social activist in that her interventions in group processes can enable participants to break their silence, mold themselves through the articulation of their thoughts and feelings, and create a culture of participation. I believe this is evident in my experience with fellow facilitators in NetWorks, Inc., a non-profit, non-stock non-government organization in the Philippines focused on harnessing leadership and management skills among the youth through capability building activities. This group of facilitators regards facilitation as an activity—a performance—that entails *critical questions* to draw out the content of the group process, *critical participants* to serve as resource persons of the event, and *critical moments* to enable the facilitator to check the flow and tenor of the discussion. As process observer, the facilitator performs roles—as evaluator, organizer, motivator, empathizer, traffic enforcer and impartial mediator or neutralizer (Victor, 2000).

While posing critical questions to the group and tapping critical participants, the facilitator herself undergoes the process of molding or re-creating his social character as she hears out new ideas and valuable insights from others. As an ethnographer, the facilitator is able to see through others' lenses. She experiences what it is like to be in the shoes of participants. Facilitation then becomes a positive contribution to the facilitator's development as a human being. Clearly, instead of acting as the ultimate leader of the group, the facilitator becomes a co-learner in the process.

As proactive audiences, participants in facilitation are seen as co-creators of both process and content. Unlike audiences in lectures and conventional public communication gatherings, these participants can move from being active discussants to co-facilitators. They share the facilitator's tasks of evaluating ideas, keeping track of the discussion flow, and sustaining the attention and interest of fellow participants in the subject being discussed. Remaining proactive throughout the discussion or activity ensures that the facilitator is far from directing attention to herself.

As a performance event, facilitation is viewed as something subject to careful planning and execution. The facilitator becomes conscious of affirming values that would enable a culture of participation to flourish. These values include open-mindedness, tolerance and solidarity, to name a few. Also, facilitators develop sensitivity towards what they bring with them in the performance space. Since

accoutrements, props and object language conjure multiple meanings to varied audiences, facilitators are made to carefully study the participants' expectations and needs and to plan out a learning situation that will address such factors. When introduced to this concept, participants, on the other hand, become willing co-builders and co-designers of the event because they feel more empowered and because they realize that their humanity is valued.

Activist teaching: Some implications

Facilitation in training is actually a viable source for facilitation in teaching. During training, the facilitator, together with the participants, first sets up the climate and the expectations for the entire training program. An activity that will be used as basis for discussion is then introduced. The discussion that follows is treated as an examination of the participants' experiences. Input from the facilitator comes next. Further discussion ensues. An understanding of the experience through the discussion and input from the facilitator and other members of the group will then be the basis for future actions of the group members. This process is called by several names, including, ADIDS (Activity-Discussion-Input-Deepening-Synthesis from the *Education Forum* in the University of the Philippines), and 4 A's (Activity-Analysis-Abstraction-Application from the Development Academy of the Philippines). What is clear in this process is that it is never purely deductive (nor didactic) where trainers start by giving lectures, and expect application to follow.

In the arena of teaching, facilitation as an engaged practice is best appreciated when the teacher subscribes to the experiential learning method. This means that the teacher departs from the traditional lecture method. The teacher treats the learners as having responsibility for their own learning. To do this, the teacher uses learning activities from which a discussion can develop. During the discussion, the teacher puts premium on what the students will say since they have experience as basis for their statements. Any input from the teacher is considered an additional knowledge but never used to undermine the student's insights (see Appendix A for a simple example of an activity-based lesson plan on public speaking).

The speech classroom, from the perspective of performance as kinesis, is a site of negotiation between input of the teacher and the students' ideas about public speaking from their own experience. No longer can this topic be taught in a very prescriptive way. Even the criteria for evaluating speeches have to be negotiated. Of course, the teacher has to present historical assumptions about what an effective speech is or what makes a good speaker, but these assumptions will be have to be questioned, re-examined, appropriated, contextualized or even subverted by students' own accounts of their experiences.

I would like to emphasize that the notions of negotiation makes facilitation not just an evocative exercise but a provocative one[2] since contributions from the students are not just accepted as they are; they are also collectively examined through critical questions to check their validity in context. Ideas have to be

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[2] This idea of facilitation is advanced by the Institute of Alternative Studies based in the University of the Philippines in Diliman, Quezon City.

constantly tested in terms of their appropriateness to their group, community and societal contexts.

This exercise I suppose would make students realize that they should not just reflect dominant assumptions about effective communication, but also participate in appropriating or reconstituting these assumptions. In this case, students will have to rethink their notions about speaking—that it is beyond adopting what previous effective speakers have done. It is not just about snake oil or formula; it is more than having impeccable grammar, audible voice, intelligible diction, vivacious and riveting gestures—all helpful traits but do not necessarily make one a good public speaker. Communication is a complex process of idea-building, and a very risky one. It is a process that is rooted in a higher purpose; it is that which, to paraphrase Hogan (2002), enables the individual to exercise his stake in making society more civil and making the world more sustainable.

When engaging student-listeners to evaluate their classmates' speeches, for instance, the teacher can ask the following questions: *What do you think is good about the speech and why? What constraints were present in the speech situation? What did the speaker do to adjust to those constraints? What else could have been done to adjust to such constraints?* The exercise becomes an act of critical thinking where students articulate the complexity of public speaking and not just accept what is considered canonical.

At this point, it would be useful to point out Benson's (2000) discussion on learner autonomy. Benson elevates the discourse on learner autonomy further when he argued for a critical perspective towards the concept. He asserts that, from the critical standpoint, "autonomy is less a matter of shaping one's life than of shaping the collective life of the society in which one lives" (p. 114). Since the development of learners as "active agents of change" is constrained by several factors (e.g., institutional and language policies), "the mediating role of the teacher thus becomes one of pushing the boundaries of these constraints in order to expand the space in which learners are able to exercise their right to autonomy in practice" (p. 117).

The thing is that the teacher as a facilitator cannot be neutral. And if I may reiterate the words of Hogan (2000, p. 55), "Everything we do is also value-laden. Facilitators are not value-free. By encouraging all members in a group to speak facilitators are valuing the input of everyone no matter what their status, experience or expertise".

Conclusion

Facilitation is an important subject of inquiry for both training professionals and teachers as the principles of process observation become increasingly useful in a global environment that yearns for consensus, cooperation, culture of collaboration, and climate of concern. By constantly improving ourselves as facilitators in the classroom, we are, in the process, teaching our students how to be conscious of and sensitive towards group processes. I suppose the 21st century school or training institution will want students who are not only idea or content-oriented but process-oriented as well.

Facilitation is an alternative method of leading group processes in our classes, training sites and even organizations. In contexts where rote learning or lecturing still predominates, it is a revolutionary way of "leading" a group of learners. It is probably what selfless leadership is. However, it should not be misconstrued as the panacea to all group-related or learner-related problems. As training expert Thiagi himself suggests, certain situations call for other tools and methods.

Finally, facilitation can lead towards a culture of informed participation. In this case, it ceases to be a mere set of roles that a person designated as a facilitator should perform. It is something to be embodied at all times to encourage participation from learners in particular and from society's stakeholders at large. It is a movement—a creative, productive one—that can transform a group, a community or even the society in general. It is no longer, in the words of Conquergood, a performance as *mimesis* or an act of faking or role-playing. It can be a performance as *kinesis* or an act of breaking. This can be manifested in critical citizenship, informed commitment to social development, and intelligent interventions for change. Hopefully, we can be, as well as help develop, facilitators and teachers who can guide the world towards its inevitable transformations.

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Appendix A: Principles of public speaking

Objectives
At the end of the lecture-discussion, the students should be able to
1. describe the nature of public speaking situations;
2. explain the principles of public speaking; and
3. write a speech criticism using the principles of public speaking.

Activity
1. Students will be asked to recall any public speaking event they have engaged in or attended recently.
2. They will be asked to write down on paper their descriptions of the public speaking event.
3. The descriptions will be discussed in small groups of five. The teacher will distribute question guides that the groups shall use during the small group discussion. The groups will be asked to generalize from the individual answers of their members.
4. After the small group discussion, a representative from each group will be asked to report on the group's discussion points.

Discussion questions/Processing
The teacher asks the following questions to process data from students:
1. What are the similarities and differences of your descriptions of the public speaking events you have attended? Present your answers in a diagram.
2. What could have set the differences among the events you have described?
3. What assumptions can you possibly make about public speaking situations?

Input/Lecture
While introducing concepts and ideas from existing literature, the teacher may affirm points articulated in the earlier discussion and relate them with existing assumptions regarding public speaking. He/she may also take note of observations that seem to deviate from existing rules or assumptions. He/she may treat them as evidence that the rules are not fixed and that they may change due to new discoveries in the field, and probably, new ways of viewing public speaking situations.

Deepening
Students will be asked to critique a speech by a Filipino public speaker using the principles of public speaking discussed earlier. Each student will be provided a question guide based on the principles presented in class.