

## **CCT 618 Journal Entry**

### **Facilitating Workshop**

**July 30/31, 2004**

My initial reaction to Day 1 of the workshop was a bit of a letdown. The group had coalesced so much during our previous workshop and I felt we were all getting to know each other as individuals and colleagues at Mach I speed. When A. gave us time to reflect to each other about where we “were” in our heads in the morning, it turned out that many people came to the workshop either tired, stressed, or on overload from the Democratic National Convention (DNC). Maybe it was an uphill battle from there to get people engaged and “in the moment.”

I know now upon reflection that the behaviors being modeled by A. were exactly what I was reading about in the handouts. Behaviors like establishing ground rules (a term I prefer to the more wordy ‘Guidelines for Participation’), suggestions on how to keep one person from dominating, managing conflict, paraphrasing, ‘checking in’ with the group, role playing, going through the Plus/Delta exercise, soliciting feedback, etc. All of those were good things and helpful things, even if I wasn’t connecting the dots at the time.

I think that the O.R.I.D. process was not made clear, especially as to how these questions would actually play out in a real group. Sometimes I could not see the difference between a Reflective question and an Interpretive one, for example. It was not even clear to me that we were following that process; it seemed as though we had bogged down somehow in questions and diversions and asides (though I did like the Parking Lot idea!). The topic that was used – “Envisioning the Future of Education” REALLY didn’t work for me and, in fact, caused misunderstandings and bad feelings in our group. Personally, I could not get a grip on how we were supposed to go about answering the 4 types of questions. We DID neglect to appoint a facilitator in the beginning or to discuss ground rules, which is probably why when D. jumped in with her enviable and encyclopedic treatment of education/media/right wing domination/ etc. – I just lost steam. I knew that I should have tried to bring the discussion back to the task at hand, but I also wanted to see how the discussion evolved on its own. I feebly tried to offer some observations along the lines of the topics that D. had introduced, but we were really floundering when A. came in to see how we were going. I believe that Donna took personal (and unwarranted) offense

at the suggestion that we choose a facilitator and it went downhill from there! Meanwhile, E. – who in previous workshops had been a strong and articulate contributor to the discussions – seemed to feel that the conversation was “above her” and that she had nothing to contribute and felt inadequate. We tried to sort this out among ourselves, unsuccessfully. If a group ever needed either a facilitator OR more **time**, it was our little group! We probably could have gotten back on course and resolved the interpersonal aspects eventually, but not in the 15 minutes we had.

The Whole System Change exercise and group activities on the second day were interesting but needed to be expedited somehow, I felt. I did not think that Gay Marriage was going to be a good topic – from the standpoint that the way it was worded seemed to presume one mind and one opinion on the issue. Although I share the opinion that gay marriage is fair and just, I did not think that we were representative enough in the way we were approaching the issue. The actions on the cards that followed showed that people were thinking of it being a case of trying to validate and gain acceptance for gay marriage in Massachusetts rather than, as I understood the topic to be, how to get people from all walks of life to DISCUSS the idea of gay marriage with MUTUAL RESPECT. Mutual implies more than one viewpoint, but as J. observed, the viewpoint that was really endorsed was pro gay marriage. I doubt if anyone had HAD the opposing view that they would have spoken up in that workshop! I like the idea of the group brainstorming for ideas, but sometimes – especially in a learning situation like this – it would seem to work better operationally to pre-choose some topics and then allow the participants to choose from among them. Either that or the wording of the actual issue would need to be less loaded somehow. The example “Identifying Educational Change” on the opposite side of the focused conversation handout would probably have worked better as a non-polarizing issue. I guess the point of this technique is to be able to use it to address controversial issues, but I didn’t think that it worked out in this workshop. I understood the example Abby gave of stakeholders getting together to discuss the construction of a mall, and why this issue WOULD work with this framework or model, but I wonder why it didn’t work with the topic of gay marriage.