

Facilitation: a concept analysis

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Facilitation: a concept analysis

The term 'facilitation' appears to be open to a wide variety of definitions and interpretations. If teachers are to act as facilitators of learning they need a clearer understanding of facilitations as a strategy for nursing education. This concept analysis uses Walker and Avant's framework. Following a review of the literature related to facilitation, the paper postulates that there are four critical attributes for effective facilitation: genuine mutual respect; a partnership in learning; a dynamic, goal-orientated process; and critical reflection. The necessary antecedents and likely consequences are identified. Model and alternative cases are offered. A distinction is made between educational facilitation and facilitation in counselling. Recommendations are given regarding the future development of empirical referents. To enhance the reader's understanding of concept analysis, the paper incorporates a reflection on the process, together with a discussion of the way in which decisions regarding the attributes were reached.

INTRODUCTION

Concepts are the words or labels given to environmental stimuli. They help to organize the world about us, but remain abstract representations of reality (Jacox 1974).

Analysing concepts determines the defining characteristics of that concept. Walker & Avant (1988) identify several purposes for concept analysis, including: clarification of ambiguous and vague terms, derivation of operational definitions, explication of problems for research and/or theory construction, and development of research instruments and nursing diagnoses.

Each promotes shared understanding and enhances communication both within nursing and between nursing and other disciplines. Furthermore, as the basic elements of theory, concept analysis enables theory to be understood and practice enhanced (Chinn & Jacobs 1987).

To guide this analysis, Walker & Avants' (1988) framework was chosen from those available as it is relatively easy to understand, enables flexibility and is identified in the literature as a valid and frequently used tool (Matteson

& Hawkins 1990, Hokianson Hawks 1991, Henneman *et al.* 1995).

WHY FACILITATION?

The idea of facilitation in teaching stems from the work of Carl Rogers (1983), whose humanistic outlook emphasized the need for student-centred learning climates. Such environments stress the freedom for individual development and, according to Rogers (1983), enable students to become more adaptable and self-directed.

In 1986 the United Kingdom Central Council (UKCC) stated that in the future nurses needed to be adaptable, analytical practitioners, committed to life-long learning, and have a problem-solving, rather than task-centred approach to nursing (UKCC 1986). At the same time there has been an increasing exhortation in nursing education literature for teachers to act as facilitators (Johnson 1986, Burnard & Chapman 1990, Townsend 1990). It is therefore postulated that nurse educators need to understand and know how to implement facilitation.

The term facilitation is used by a wide variety of groups, each interpreting the concept slightly differently. In addition, the literature appears at times to confuse educative facilitation with counselling (Burnard 1985), to suggest

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a somewhat reactive rather than proactive process (Brookfield 1986), and to offer few clear definitions or suggestions as to how the nurse educator should implement facilitation.

THE STUDY

The aims of this analysis are to clarify the meaning of facilitation and differentiate between facilitation in counselling and in education.

Throughout the study, it was recognized that the analysis could not be value free, due to the bias of choice and the influences of the author's own consciousness (Williams 1988). However, every effort has been made to maintain objectivity.

Uses and definitions of facilitation

Walker & Avant (1988) suggest that in addition to the relevant literature, colleagues should be used as thoughtful sources for the analysis. Consequently, the author asked 18 nursing and non-nursing peers for their personal definitions of facilitation. The non-nurses were included to reduce the likely bias of sourcing definitions from a group comprised predominantly of nurse teachers. Interestingly, however, two of the four non-nursing colleagues provided educational interpretations.

Together with information from thesauruses and general and specialist dictionaries, the responses were listed on box file cards and clustered via a dendrogram (Bromley 1986). Although time consuming and difficult, this process produced a preliminary list of definitions. These were reviewed by two peers as a check for reliability. A further test for reliability was made when, after a period of reflection and without reference to the first cluster, the exercise was repeated. The results are shown in Figure 1.

A number of uses of facilitation were found in the literature. These were tabulated into physiological, psychological and social categories, as suggested by Walker & Avant (1988). Two additional categories on occupational and educative uses were also identified (Table 1).

Physiologically, facilitation refers to nerve impulse transmission (Tortora & Anagnostakos 1984, Child 1986). In this context, Longman's dictionary defines the concept as 'the ease with which an impulse is conducted along a nerve' (Longman 1985). This interpretation equates with the first cluster category of making something easier (Figure 1).

Conversely, occupational facilitation emphasizes promotion of action and helping others achieve their goals. This is exemplified by Harrison & Kitchens' (1989) description of research facilitation as the preparation and motivation of others to initiate and conduct research. The facilitator is expected to create a supportive climate, help with administration and the development of research

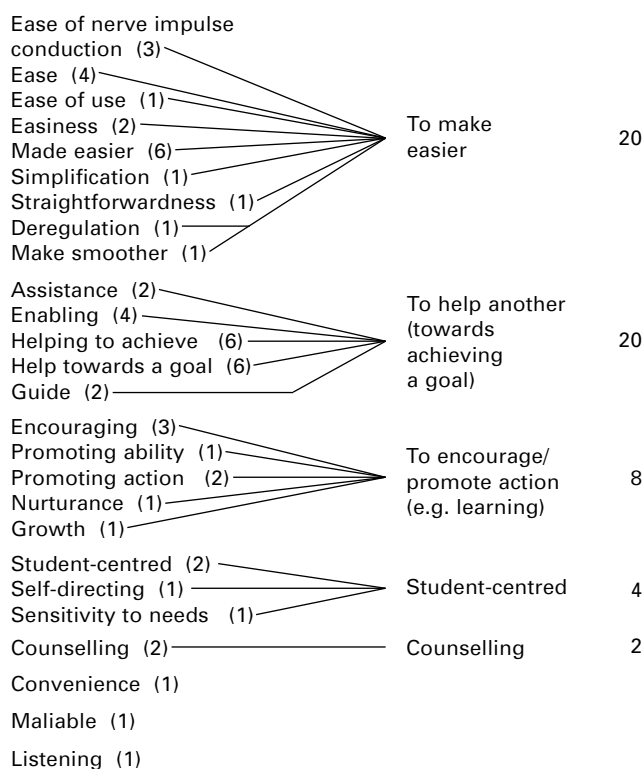


Figure 1 A dendrogram of dictionary and peer definitions of facilitation.

methods, provide resources and review proposals. The latter implies that a degree of questioning and challenging exists.

Critical reflection is a pivotal feature of primary care facilitation (Astrop 1988). The facilitator is regarded as a change agent who provides practical advice and support to staff in health centres. Astrop (1988), together with Beckett & Wall (1985), further suggest that effective facilitation is dependent upon good interpersonal skills.

Beckett & Wall (1985) view facilitation from the perspective of the nurse practitioner's educational role. They see the process as one of guiding another person to meet their needs. Drawing upon Rogers (1983) and Heron (1977), they emphasize the necessity of developing a supportive relationship based upon a mutual exchange of ideas, knowledge and experiences.

Creating a supportive climate is central to facilitation in counselling (Heron 1975). The aim is to promote interaction through sensitivity to clients' needs, in order to help them achieve their goals. Facilitators should maintain a balance and, in addition, a voluntary contract of participation must exist on both sides (Heron 1975, Ellis & Watson 1987, Sutherland 1989).

A lack of sensitivity creates the problems that arise in social facilitation. This theory considers the effect of observer presence upon performance level (Zajonc 1965) (cited by Kushnir 1986). When tasks are learnt and well

Table 1 Possible uses of the concept facilitation

Physiological	Occupational
1 'The furtherance of neural activities by conduction... or stimulation' (Osol 1972)	1 Primary care facilitation (Astrop 1988)
'the sum total of excitatory or inhibitory impulses' governing whether impulses will be passed to the next neurone (Child 1986)	2 Research facilitation (Harrison & Kitchens 1989)
	3 Clinical facilitation (Beckett & Wall 1985, Briggs 1985)
Physiological	Social
1 Group counselling	1 The process of assisting or helping someone with their needs
2 'The process of promoting interaction in a therapy group' (Sutherland 1989)	2 Encouraging, enabling towards a mutually agreed goal
	3 Making easier, more achievable
	4 Social facilitation theory (Kushnir 1986)
Educational	
1 'Process by which a facilitator acts as a catalyst to stimulate discussion in a group rather than to impart information' (Page & Thomas 1977)	
2 'Assisting adults to make sense of and act upon the personal, social and occupational and political environment in which they live' (Brookfield 1986)	
3 A process of giving direction by drawing upon one's own experiences, 'to guide another individual along a pathway appropriate to their needs' (Beckett & Wall 1985)	

rehearsed, being observed tends to enhance performance. However, if new learning is observed, performance is impaired (Kushnir 1986).

Kushnir (1986), examining this theory for nursing education, hypothesized that while the aim of teaching is to reduce errors, the presence of observers in skills learning results in increased errors. She postulated that this occurred due to fear of failure and embarrassment. Consequently, she recommended that teachers should reduce potential sources of anxiety and create more supportive learning environments.

Educational facilitation

Much of the literature on educational facilitation is based upon the writings of Heron (1977) and Rogers (1983). Consequently, these works, together with those of Brookfield (1986) and Townsend (1990), are considered in some depth. Despite his psychotherapeutic background, Heron (1977) perceives facilitation as education rather than as therapy. Interestingly he bases this opinion upon an extension of education to include: 'such notions as personal development, interpersonal skills, working with feelings both expressively here and now, and cathartically through regression work, transpersonal development and social action skills' (Heron 1977).

Heron (1977) describes six dimensions of facilitation for use in either one-to-one or one-to-group interactions. The polar pairs (Table 2) are regarded as value neutral, with no pole or dimension perceived as more important than any other. Specific explanations are given of ways to behave in each category. Additionally, Heron (1977) identifies the

factors to be considered when choosing the styles to use. This inductive theory, which arose from participation within counselling and experiential groups, appears well suited to counselling. However, it is questionable whether nurse educators would use the breadth and depth of strategies described within a pre-registration nursing curriculum.

Rogers' (1983) ideas, although also arising from psychotherapy, were tested within education before being published. While the characteristics of facilitation are not explicated, empathy, congruence and positive regard are identified as necessary conditions. Rogers (1983) also emphasizes the importance of knowledge being shared through negotiation and of the facilitator being genuine. However, despite several practical scenarios of facilitation in his book, Rogers fails to provide clear guidelines on how to implement the process.

Conversely, Brookfield (1986) specifies six central principles for effective facilitation of which one, praxis, clearly indicates the way in which he believes facilitation should be implemented. He considers facilitation to be a complex, active teaching method far removed from the non-directive resource provision of 'folk wisdom'. Tutors and students are seen to work together in collaboration, sharing themselves and their experiences in a process of critical reflection. Learning results from an innate desire for development and is aimed towards self-direction.

Student self-direction is also emphasized by Townsend (1990). She views facilitation as a way of life, whereby tutors promote open learning climates in which ideas are challenged supportively. The facilitator becomes a co-learner, sharing responsibility and control with the

Table 2 Heron's (1977) six dimensions of facilitator styles

Directive–non-directive	Facilitator takes or delegates responsibility to the learner
Interpretative–non-interpretative	Facilitator gives meaning to or simply indicates the behavioural activity
Confronting–non-confronting	Facilitator supportingly challenges distorted behaviour or creates a climate for self-confrontation
Cathartic–non-cathartic	Facilitator actively elicits cathartic release or creates a climate of tension reduction
Structuring–unstructuring	Facilitator provides structure for experiential learning or provides experiential learning that requires no structuring
Disclosing–non-disclosing	Facilitator shares own thoughts and feelings or stays silent

student. Thus facilitation is viewed as a conscious dynamic process by a number of writers.

DETERMINATION OF CRITICAL ATTRIBUTES

Despite the apparent congruence it was difficult to identify sufficient commonality both among the specialist writers and between the writers and cluster results, for attributes to be synthesized. The material was constantly reviewed and lists, clusters and tables, developed and discarded. Eventually, the work was set aside allowing a period for reflection.

The idea that Brookfield's (1986) six principles could form the basis of attribute identification began to take shape. A table of provisional criteria was developed in which Brookfield's (1986) principles were inserted, followed by Heron's (1977) dimensions. The cluster results and keywords from Rogers (1983) and Townsend (1990) were added. Finally a column for 'other authors' was compiled. Items that did not clearly fit the categories were inserted into a separate horizontal column (Table 3). The table was then set aside.

Of particular concern was that the stimulation of gaining insight into the analysis could result in bias, with the author attempting to create or force a fit. Consequently, the original literature was returned to and a second in-depth and more critical comparison made. Particular emphasis was placed on the postulated match between Brookfield (1986) and Heron (1977), as this was perceived to be the least justified area. This second analysis appeared to confirm the initial results. As such, the findings were tested upon colleagues, with explanations being given for the decisions made.

Psychotherapy–education continuum

The chronological sequence from Heron (1977) to Townsend (1990) is matched by a psychotherapy–education continuum. However, much of the education literature continues to draw upon Heron's (1977) dimensions (Beckett & Wall 1985, Quinn 1988, Burnard & Chapman 1990). A nurse educator attempting to interpret facilitation

in this way may be ill-prepared to utilize some of the more psychotherapeutic teaching strategies, such as regression training and co-counselling, unless they are mental-health trained. Indeed, it could be argued that these methods are unsuitable for many sessions in the non-mental health curriculum. Possibly as a result of this, facilitation has become synonymous in some circles with a somewhat reactive process of resource provision (Brookfield 1986). However, both Heron (1977) and Brookfield (1986) view facilitation as a proactive dynamic process. It is the way this process is implemented, rather than the defining characteristics, that appear to constitute the major differences between the two authors.

To some extent the variety of jargon used in the literature hides the congruence that does appear to exist within the horizontal categories. For example, Brookfield's (1986) 'collaborative spirit' involves leadership and facilitation roles being assumed by different group members at different times (Table 3). This can be seen to equate with Heron's (1977) view that the facilitator takes or delegates responsibility to the learner as appropriate. Townsend (1990) recognizes the non-directive aspect of facilitation and, together with Brookfield (1986) and Rogers (1983), discusses the characteristics of negotiation involved. Finally, this co-operation appears consistent with the cluster category of 'helping another'.

The two horizontal categories of voluntary participation and self-direction did not, upon reflection, appear to be critical attributes. Voluntary participation is defined as an innate desire to develop knowledge, skills and attitudes in combination with an active participation in learning (Brookfield 1986). By grounding learning in students' experiences and assisting them to make sense of their worlds, facilitators can augment intrinsic motivation and enhance active participation (Heron 1977, Rogers 1983, Brookfield 1986). Conversely, if teaching does not meet students' needs, learners are able to withdraw mentally. However, as students can do this in any 'learning' situation, it appears that this item is not a defining characteristic. Equally, although Heron (1977) identifies structuring–unstructuring as a facilitation style, other authors view self-direction as the aim of effective facilitation (Rogers 1983, Brookfield 1986, Townsend 1990).

Table 3 The critical attributes

Dendrogram results	Heron (1977)	Rogers (1983)	Brookfield (1986)	Townsend (1990)	Other authors
	Active participation	Experiential grounded in experience	Voluntary participation	Learning is enabled not taught	
Sensitivity to needs	Disclosing–non-disclosing Cathartic–non-cathartic (result of)	Genuineness, empathy and positive regard	Mutual respect	Realistic and moderate expression of emotions Authenticity Safe environment	Creation of a supportive learning climate
To help another Encourage/ promote action	Directive–non-directive	Negotiation	Collaborative spirit	Learning partners Non-directive Negotiation and contracting Accountability	Co-operation Learning contracts Mutual exchange of ideas
Goal achievement To make easier Enabling learning	Interpretive–non-interpretive Cathartic–non-cathartic (practice of)	Enabling Processing Provider of resources Shares knowledge	Praxis Dynamic process	Goal orientated Help keep students' learning on track Provider of resources	Manager of learning Goal orientated Cross pollinator Shares knowledge
	Confronting–non-confronting	Questioning Challenging	Critical reflection	Reflection Evaluation Questioning, probing and challenging	Evaluation and feedback
Student rather than task centred	Structuring–unstructuring	Control moves towards the student Students become active and enthusiastic	Self-direction	Tutors and students become self-directed learners Autonomy Independence	Autonomy Freedom to learn continuously
Neural transmission Counselling	Psychotherapy	Self-awareness Achievement of learning goals	Achievement of learning goals	Tutors and students understand facilitation	Good interpersonal skills and self-awareness Social facilitation theory

Therefore, this entity is considered a consequence of facilitation.

CONCEPTS DEFINED

Critical attributes are the defining characteristics of concepts. They differentiate one concept from another as each combination is unique. However, because it is possible for two people to identify slightly different attributes for the same concept, all findings must be viewed tentatively (Walker & Avant 1988).

In defining the attributes, facilitation was regarded as a strategy for both counselling and education. Those attributes emerging from the literature included:

1 genuine mutual respect;

2 the development of a partnership in learning;
3 a dynamic goal-orientated process;
4 the practice of critical reflection.

Each of these is considered in turn.

Genuine mutual respect

Respect is defined as the quality or state of being esteemed. It implies consideration and positive regard. If facilitation is to be effective, respect must be offered sincerely. Participants' attitudes must be congruent with their behaviour.

Equally, respect must be mutual. Dictionaries define mutuality as a specified feeling between two or more persons (Allen 1984, Longman 1985). In facilitation, this

feeling should incorporate an acknowledgement of the individual's self-worth and uniqueness (Brookfield 1986).

To achieve genuine mutual respect, facilitators must create an open learning climate in which participants are able to share their thoughts and feelings. The facilitator may use silence to promote disclosure in others, or they may self-disclose. The degree to which feelings are shared depends upon whether sessions focus on counselling or education. In the latter, Townsend (1990) suggests that disclosures must be realistic for the situation and involve only a moderate expression of emotions. In education, openness does not have to be a cathartic exercise. Indeed, it is more likely to involve sharing tentative opinions, acknowledging good points and limitations, and expressing uncertainty or sudden insight.

A partnership in learning

The term partnership was chosen in preference to collaboration as it appeared less jargonistic. Partnership suggests an association involving close co-operation, whereby participants work together to learn. In counselling, learning is predominantly about the self, whereas in education it encompasses both personal and professional development.

The partnership involves the facilitator as a co-learner. The facilitator either takes or delegates leadership, but responsibility is shared through a process of negotiation. Brookfield (1986) asserts that this may be problematical in education if formal accreditation is required and governed by outside authorities.

However, Henfield & Waldron (1988) believe that the Rule 18a competencies (UKCC 1983) suggest that nurses analyse their practice and become self-directing. Conversely, Townsend (1990) warns that students need guidance and support to accept responsibility if they are not to be overwhelmed by anxiety and frustration. A possible solution is to use learning contracts to help the student (or client) identify their goals.

A dynamic goal-orientated process

Facilitation is proactive and dynamic. It is not a process of stepping back and simply providing resources. Indeed, Beckett & Wall (1985) describe the facilitator as a manager of learning, while Goodall (1990) asserts that facilitators must recognize and share their knowledge and experiences.

The practice of facilitation involves assisting with goal identification, encouraging investigation, giving meaning to activities and indicating appropriate resources. Additionally, participants are encouraged and enabled to process their learning (Figure 2).

Although the process of facilitation is consistent in education and counselling, different strategies and goals are identified. The client's focus may be self-confrontation and

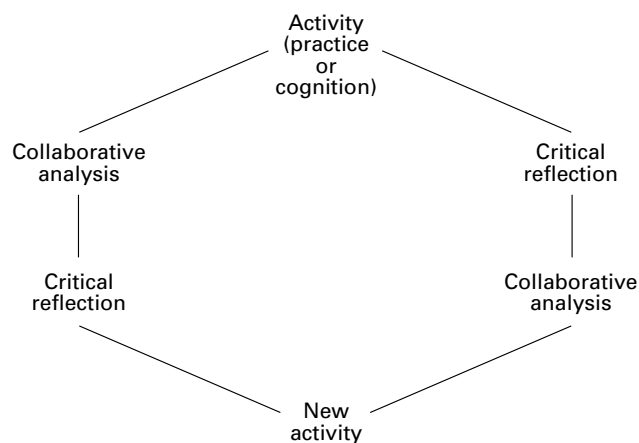


Figure 2 The process of facilitation.

self-awareness, while students are likely to follow a process of scientific enquiry and skills learning. Each, however, needs to incorporate critical reflection.

Practice of critical reflection

The attribute of critical reflection is dependent upon the existence of genuine mutual respect. In supportive climates, participants should feel sufficiently comfortable to be challenged and to challenge each other.

Facilitators should promote strategies of questioning, probing and debating, so that with increasing experience and confidence learners are able to question their own and other's assumptions, thoughts and attitudes. The skills of self-evaluation and critical reflection enable growth, enhance significant learning and promote self-direction.

FACILITATION REDEFINED

As a result of identifying the attributes, it is possible to offer a tentative definition of facilitation:

Facilitation is a goal-orientated dynamic process, in which participants work together in an atmosphere of genuine mutual respect, in order to learn through critical reflection.

It appears that while the attributes of facilitation are consistent, the emphasis within each depends upon whether the focus is education or counselling. Having identified the differences and similarities, the remaining sections concentrate upon educative facilitation.

Antecedents

Walker & Avant (1988) suggest that identifying antecedents and consequences helps to clarify the critical attributes and any underlying assumptions. Antecedents are the incidents occurring prior to the concept, while consequences are the result.

The antecedents of facilitation were identified as follows.

- 1 Two or more people voluntarily participating within a learning situation (Heron 1975, Rogers 1983, Brookfield 1986). One is commonly viewed as the teacher and the remainder as students.
- 2 All participants acknowledge that we cannot teach directly, but only facilitate learning (Beckett & Wall 1985, Townsend 1990).
- 3 The teacher possesses effective interpersonal skills (Beckett & Wall 1985, Astrop 1988) and is self-aware (Rogers 1983, Hsieh & Knowles 1990).
- 4 Teachers and students know what facilitation is and understand how it can be implemented (Townsend 1990). Without this understanding the interactive process fails and students' anxiety and frustrations increase (Townsend 1990).

Consequences

The consequences of facilitation are as follows.

- 1 Students become active, enthusiastic, self-directed learners (Rogers 1983, Brookfield 1986, Townsend 1990).
- 2 The facilitator becomes a co-learner (Townsend 1990).
- 3 The facilitator loses central control. By delegating leadership and sharing responsibility, control is lost. Equally, as students become self-directed, control shifts towards them (Rogers 1983, Townsend 1990).
- 4 Learning goals are achieved. This consequence is offered tentatively as the writer believes it may not always hold true. However, the literature does indicate that facilitation enhances goal achievement (Rogers 1983, Brookfield 1986).

DEVELOPMENT OF MODEL AND ADDITIONAL CASES

Walker & Avant (1988) advocate the development of cases to clarify the concept further. Those presented are taken from three aspects of the nurse educator's role, namely personal tutorials, clinical and classroom teaching. Invented and illegitimate cases are not offered, as Walker & Avant (1988) suggest that these need only be used to explicate commonplace concepts, or if the concept is used improperly.

Model case

A model case is a perfect example of the use of the concept.

Sarah made an appointment to see her tutor. When she arrived they decided what they would do in the time available. Nicky asked several probing questions, which prompted Sarah to reconsider some aspects of her assignment. Sarah then asked for help

in understanding a particularly difficult article. Each actively listened to the other and acknowledged the value of their differing opinions.

Each of the critical attributes is represented in this case. By actively listening and valuing each other's opinions, Nicky and Sarah demonstrate genuine mutual respect. Goal orientation is established when they decide what can be achieved in the time available. Critical reflection is evident in Sarah reviewing the contents of her assignment. Finally, tutor and student behave as partners in learning when they review the article together.

Borderline case

Borderline cases contain some, but not all, of the critical attributes.

Harriet's tutor was waiting for her on the ward. Harriet said 'hello' and was then silent. This tutor always made her feel uncomfortable.

'What would you like to do today?'

'Well, I need to practice injections.'

'Okay, shall we look at the theory first and then link it to your practice. Afterwards you can tell me how you think you're getting on.'

In this case most of the attributes are met, apart from genuine mutual respect for which there is contrary evidence. Harriet feels uncomfortable in the presence of her tutor, who does nothing to create an open supportive learning climate. Negotiation and goal orientation do exist, in so far as Harriet is offered the opportunity to state her overall goal. In addition, she is asked to reflect upon her practice.

Related cases

Several of the terms used in describing facilitation, while related to the concept, are not in themselves critical attributes, nor do they contain the defining characteristics. Examples of related terms include teaching, counselling, openness, enabling and resource provision.

Contrary case

A contrary case is an example of a situation that does not reflect the concept (Walker & Avant 1988). The case presented here is based on resource provision and offered as the 'folk wisdom' view of facilitation (Brookfield 1986).

Jane had papers to mark, but two colleagues were sick and the group had a session on research methods. Jane selected some books and placed them in the classroom. She left a message on the board with instructions on what to do and her whereabouts should there be any problems.

This case clearly contains none of the attributes of facilitation. However, it does highlight the difference between facilitation as a dynamic process, over the mere provision of resources in order to make something easier. As these two perspectives are sometimes confused it was believed to be particularly useful to clarify the differences using a contrary case.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF EMPIRICAL REFERENTS

Empirical referents are categories of actual phenomena that by their presence demonstrate the concept. In some cases they are identical to the attributes (Walker & Avant 1988). However, with concepts as abstract as facilitation, operational definitions must be synthesized separately.

A number of instruments are available that purport to measure effective facilitation (Suanmali 1981, Conti 1985, cited by Brookfield 1986). However, on close examination these tools contain ambiguous and vague terms and it is difficult to ascertain precisely the behaviours that would be looked for. Equally, the instruments may be incongruent with the attributes identified in this particular analysis.

It is outside the scope of this paper to formulate operational definitions. However, it is postulated that the use of higher order questions would be expected as one criterion of the practice of critical reflection, while active listening skills, as defined by Smith (1986), might constitute evidence towards the existence of genuine mutual respect.

CONCLUSIONS

Although the characteristics that define facilitation appear congruent in both education and counselling, the way the process is implemented differs. This is particularly evident in the degree to which feelings are shared and within the focus of goal identification.

It should be noted that during the analysis it became apparent that the literature review on facilitation in counselling lacked breadth and depth. However, as the main focus of the analysis was education, a decision was taken not to extend the review. Consequently the suggestion that the attributes are relevant for counselling must be viewed with some tentativeness.

Concept analysis is only the basis for theory development. Although the identified attributes may enhance understanding of facilitation, further work is needed to operationalize the concept. An in-depth examination of how each attribute can be implemented is required and empirical referents need to be developed and tested out. Findings must then be disseminated.

If nurse educators are to view facilitation as more than mere resource provision and negotiation, they must be

guided on how to develop, practice and evaluate their skills. Only in this way can they be enabled to implement facilitation both competently and confidently.

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